# THAT OFFICE BOY

FRANCIS J. FINN, S.J.

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# THAT OFFICE BOY

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"'What!' cried the contest editor, jumping from his chair, and gazing open mouthed at the calm youth in knickerbockers." *(Page 177)*

# THAT OFFICE BOY

BY

FRANCIS J. FINN, S.J.

Author of "Percy Wynn," "Tom Playfair," "Harry Dee," etc.

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# CONTENTS


CHAPTER I PAGE

In which Michael Desmond reads the morning paper, and, in consequence, is drawn into a series of adventures and undreamed-of complications . 9

CHAPTER II

In which Michael goes home, and the first skirmishes of the contest are narrated . . . . . 31

CHAPTER III

In which the troubles of Michael are multiplied by seventeen, and Father Carney goes without lunch 43

CHAPTER IV

Father Carney becomes a diplomatist, and creates a sensation . . . . . 57

CHAPTER V

Father Donnell entertains an angel unawares, and looks vainly for more heavenly visitants . . 66

CHAPTER VI

In which is given a true and unvarnished account of Policeman Jones and his experiences in attempting to disperse an army of small boys . . 77

CHAPTER VII PAGE

James Connell goes to confession, thereby saving two detectives considerable trouble . . . 94

CHAPTER VIII

The Sunflowers begin to show their strength. Michael visits Father Carney and meets Colonel Bridwell . . . . . 111

CHAPTER IX

A sad chapter, and therefore short. Michael, becoming desperate, seeks counsel . . . . 120

CHAPTER X

Michael carries a secret in his bosom. Enter a mysterious woman. The plot thickens . . . 125

CHAPTER XI

Eva Fagan walks in mystery, and Brother Fat leaves his supper untasted. Josephine is tempted to pray for life, and yields . . . . . 134

CHAPTER XII

The mysterious woman again. Miss Tennison faints, and the office force is shocked . . . 143

CHAPTER XIII

A chapter of surprises; Eva is taken ill, and Brother Fat makes a startling discovery . . 150

CHAPTER XIV PAGE

St. Xavier School is always on the top. Jerry sees the very latest thing in the way of a ghost . 163

CHAPTER XV

In which Michael discovers his little secret, and dismays the "Starboard" Contest Editor . . . 170

CHAPTER XVI

Colonel Bridwell, mindful of Christmas, acts as the dove of peace . . . . . 177

CHAPTER XVII

A little love and a case of scruples . . . . 182

CHAPTER XVIII

In which Christmas comes and everybody is happy 198

# THAT OFFICE BOY

## CHAPTER I

*In Which Michael Desmond Reads the Morning Paper, and, in Consequence, is Drawn into a Series of Adventures and Undreamed-of Complications.*

IN THE outer and inner offices of St. Xavier School all was quiet. Within, Father Carney was looking over the morning paper; without, Michael was sitting before his desk, his head thrown back, his eyes dreamily fixed on the ceiling. It was nine o'clock in the morning, and, to borrow Michael's expression, "there was nothing doing." Twelve hundred children, apportioned, according to sex and different grades of ignorance, into twenty-three classrooms were within easy reach of the office; but there came no sound to indicate their propinquity. The fog without, thick, heavy, novembrine, seemed to deaden the noises of Sycamore and the neighboring streets.

"Why don't something happen?" mused Michael. "A fellow would even be glad of an earthquake."

The fog and the quiet and the dullness made common cause to enter into the soul of the sen-

sitive youth. He resisted; and his form of resistance gave itself outward expression in whistling. Michael was not a bird, but his notes were clear, piercing, and high. The author of *"The Good Old Summer Time"* would have been pleased had he been present to hear Master Michael's high-pitched rendition.

Forgetful of time and place, he was repeating the chorus, when certain sounds from the inner office caused him to stop whistling with inartistic suddenness.

"Oh, gee!" grunted Michael, under his breath. "I clean forgot! I'm in for it now."

Father Carney, newspaper in hand, was beaming on him from the inner doorway.

"Michael," said the Director of St. Xavier School in his sweetest manner, "I really must congratulate you on your improved whistling. If my memory serves me right, you haven't given us an exhibition of your skill in that particular line since your first week in the office, which was sometime in September—just about three months ago."

"Yes, Father," said Michael, meekly. He remembered vividly how Father Carney had suggested to him at that time that whenever an uncontrollable impulse to whistle came upon him he was at liberty to go into the yard and remain there till he had whistled himself out.

"The improvement," continued Father Carney, as he stepped from his proper office into Michael's, "is decided. In fact, I think I made out the tune. It was Wagner's Spinning-Wheel Song, wasn't it?"

"No, Father," answered Michael, whose knowledge of Wagner was less than rudimentary, "it was not. I never heard of such a song; and I don't think I know that Wagner you're talking about. I forgot and was whistling 'The Good Old Summer Time.' "

"At any rate, it was very fine. Would you mind whistling that waltz part again?"

"Aw, say!" cried Michael, flushing hotly.

"Go on, Michael."

"You're kidding me, Father."

"Come on; let's hear it."

Thus urged, Michael puckered his lips and rendered the chorus, with an audience of one serenely staring him in the face.

"If he had batted me over the head," Michael subsequently remarked to his mother, "I'd have felt a heap better off. But he just stood and grinned. It was the first time, too, I whistled since he told me not to in September. I clean forgot. It was such a gloomy day—four days after our Thanksgiving supper, and nothing going on till Christmas—and I was feeling lazy and blue. Generally when I feel like whistling in the office, I think about death or hell; but, I couldn't think of things like that when I was blue, and so I let go; and Father Carney came out and talked as if he were just tickled to death with my whistling; and just made me do it all over again while he kept on staring and grinning. Say, ain't that a funny way to rub it in? Another fellow would throw something at me. I wish *he* would."

"Michael," resumed Father Carney, when the office boy, his face like a boiled lobster, had

come to the end of the melody, "permit me to congratulate you once more; and I feel that if you were to do that kind of thing *outside*—particularly in the country where there are no houses near by, it would have an excellent effect, and give the birds new ideas."

"Yes, Father," returned the crushed youth.

"Perhaps," continued Father Carney, suavely, "as you seem to have nothing to do, you'd like to look over the morning paper. I see some bonds advertised at very attractive prices; some of them may interest you." And handing Michael the newspaper, Father Carney retreated into his proper *sanctum*.

"Oh, say!" growled Michael. "Does he really want me to look at the paper, or is he only guying me? Anyhow, I'll look up that prize-fight."

Now, if Michael had not decided to read the paper, there would, in all likelihood, be no story to tell. Upon such trifles hangs many a glorious tale.

"Is Father Carney in, Michael?"

The office boy, deep in the fifth round of a battle between two well-known prize-fighters, raised neither head nor eyes, as he answered, "There's some one inside that looks just like him. Want to see him, little girl?"

"Yes, please."

Michael laid down the paper, carefully placing a ruler over the fifth round, and stepping forward announced:

"Father Carney, there's a little girl wants to see you."

"Tell her to come in."

"You may go in," said Michael, resuming his paper. And so, as further events will show, there stepped into Father Carney's office one of the principal characters of this veracious story, Eva Fagan.

Eva was turned thirteen, tall, slim, graceful, and remarkably quick in her movements. Her face, slightly freckled, was a clear oval. She was neither ugly nor pretty—a plain, every-day girl. Her one distinctive characteristic was a graceful quickness of movement. She thought there was nobody in the world like Father Carney; she adored him; and the reason for her adoration was quite simple.

Eva Fagan was an orphan. When her father died some nineteen months before the opening of this story, she was left with an inheritance which yielded her a yearly income of about two hundred and fifty dollars. Of course, there were ever so many cousins and aunts and uncles not only willing but most anxious to take the little heiress under their wings. As is too often the case, the loudest and most aggressive won the fight, and Eva was committed to the tender mercies of Mr. Jack Random and to the bosom of Mr. Random's family, said bosom consisting of a slatternly wife, who gossiped through the waking hours of the day, a shiftless son, and a daughter of seventeen who haunted the moving picture shows.

Nobody—unless possibly a few of the initiated—had the least idea how the Random family contrived to exist. The father was never known, even in a fit of absent-mindedness, to

work; the son was his faithful imitator; the wife did as little as was possible for the actual upkeep of their suite of three rooms; as for the daughter, the time not devoted to moving picture shows and sleep was given to long hours of shopping. In this latter diversion, Miss Random was pleased to have Eva as a companion as often as possible; so often, indeed, that it was not uncommon in Eva's first year at St. Xavier's for her to be absent from class for as many as two or three afternoons in the week. These absences continuing in spite of Father Carney's remonstrances, Miss Shinners of the Juvenile Court was asked to look into the causes. This she accordingly did and, after a week's investigation, came hot-foot and all excitement one morning to inform Father Carney that, in the person of Eva Fagan, he had the honor of having in attendance at St. Xavier School the most accomplished shoplifter of her age in the city of Cincinnati and the County of Hamilton.

"Good gracious," cried Father Carney, "that little mite of a thing?"

"Yes; there's no doubt of it. Miss Random has been an apt teacher, and has found in little Eva an apt pupil. The child has wonderful hands—quick, nervous, certain. The Juvenile Court is going to make a record on this case. Why, that girl alone has stolen over two thousand dollars' worth of goods, and done it all within the last twelve months."

"Good gracious," cried Father Carney, taking up a cigar in one hand and a match in the other, putting the match in his mouth and strik-

ing the cigar on his match-case. The cigar was ruined on his match-case, and the good Father, noticing his mistake, took the match out of his mouth and carefully deposited it—though it was perfectly good—in the cuspidor. Father Carney was excited. The cigar unlighted followed the match.

"Eva is a very obstinate and sullen child," the probation officer went on to observe. "She will admit nothing. She will hardly speak at all. I've gruelled her for two hours and more without getting any information out of her. I'm afraid she's bad."

"So am I," said Father Carney, wiping his face. "Of course, I'll expel her at once. The only question is, where shall we put her? I'm afraid she's too far gone to be placed with the little children who are sheltered at the Good Shepherd Convent."

"I'd never put her there," said Miss Shinners, with much emphasis. "Eva is a criminal. Delaware is the place for her. The Juvenile Judge will settle that."

"It's too bad," continued Father Carney, "I'm afraid this thing will hurt the reputation of the school."

"I'm sorry she is attending here myself, Father Carney; but she's been here only a short time, and everybody will easily see that she got her training in shoplifting in spite of St. Xavier's. Well, I must be going. There's much to be cleared up yet. We are going to take the girl to the house of detention to-night; so if you wish to see her, do so to-day."

"I'll see her at once," said Father Carney. "Good-bye, Miss Shinners. I thank you for your trouble.—Here, Michael, go to the seventh grade class at once, and tell the Sister that I want to see Eva Fagan. Let her come to my office with all her books."

Presently Eva entered. Her head was down, set at an obstinate angle.

"Sit down, Eva. What's this I hear about you?"

"I don't know what you heard."

Eva's hands were interlocked, her fingers were moving like separate living, squirming entities. Looking at her face alone, sullen, lowering, brazen, one would not have suspected that she was in the least nervous.

"It seems that you are a thief."

"No; I am not."

"You are a shoplifter."

The little head went down lower; the face that should have been innocent, grew darker; the fingers writhed and wriggled; but no sound came from the child's lips.

"Eva Fagan, you have disgraced St. Xavier School."

Still that obstinate silence.

"What will the people of the city say when they read that St. Xavier's is educating the worst shoplifter in the annals of our Juvenile Court?"

The girl looked, if possible, more sullen than ever.

"Have you nothing to say?"

"I am not a thief," came the low answer.

"Any one," commented Father Carney,

"who will steal, will lie. By the way, when did you go to confession?"

"I went last Saturday."

"And did you go to communion Sunday?"

"Yes, Father."

"And how often do you go to communion?"

"Every two weeks."

"Do you go to the same confessor?"

"I go to almost any one."

"And do you mean to say that you've been stealing week after week, and then going to confession and communion, as though you had done nothing at all?"

Down went the head again, raised during the answers to Father Carney's questions. Once more the interlocking hands, the wriggling fingers.

"Do you mean to tell me that you've confessed your sins of theft all these months?"

The obstinacy of that child's face seemed to grow.

"That will do!" cried Father Carney. "Get up and go. Take your books and belongings, and never show your face in St. Xavier School again."

Father Carney's face had gone white; he was very angry.

Eva rose, picked up her books and made for the door. It was all done so quickly. Suddenly she stopped, turned, and made a little bow, and was gone. The bow was plainly a last farewell.

It had an effect upon Father Carney: it moved him strangely. He had noticed in that moment something pathetic in the child's face.

Had he been right, he asked himself? Of course, he had. There could be no doubt. There was only one course open to him. And yet!—It was the fine custom of Father Carney, as, I doubt not, it is the custom of thousands and thousands of Catholics to breathe, in trying moments, that sweet little prayer. *"Sub tuum praesidium."* He said it now, and, even before he had quite finished, sprang into Michael's office.

"Quick, Michael, run and catch that girl and bring her back."

Michael rose to the occasion—that is, he ran. He had heard loud, and, be it confessed, angry tones issuing from the inner office, he had seen little Eva with all her books under her arm, turn her steps not back to her classroom but out the front doorway, and he knew that something serious must have come to pass.

He returned very quickly, flushed and somewhat breathless, holding the young miss by the arm, being for the moment every inch a policeman.

"Here she is, Father. I got her all right."

"Very good, Michael. I think, my boy, you are pinching her unduly. Eva is not going to run away. Come in, my girl, for a few moments. Thank you again, Michael, and if any one comes in just tell them to wait a few minutes."

Eva resumed her seat. Wonder and inquiry took away something of her previous expression of obstinacy.

"Now, Eva, suppose we have another little talk. You're an orphan, aren't you?"

"Yes, Father."

"I'm sorry to say I overlooked that point a few moments ago. It isn't as though you had your own kind father and your dear mother to care for you. Do you remember your mother, Eva?"

"Yes," said Eva, softly.

"And you loved her?"

"Yes," said Eva.

"And she's praying for you in heaven, I doubt not. She was, I am told, a very good mother."

Eva sniffed and coughed.

"And I met your father once. He was an honest man, and could look the whole world in the face."

The ugly lines on Eva's countenance were disappearing. She was swallowing hard and audibly.

"I wonder does your mother in heaven know that you are a shoplifter?"

Then Eva lifted up her voice and wept. Father Carney took a few turns up and down the room.

"And," he continued, "if she does know it, I'm sure she would not want everybody in Cincinnati to hear about it. After all she knows better than anybody else in the world what a dear little child you were when she had you to herself. And your father, if he knows it, won't give you up either. He thinks better of you than that."

Eva was dabbing her face with a very inadequate handkerchief.

"And Our Lord," went on Father Carney, "must be a little put out with me for being so cross with you just now; because He has a special love for orphans. I gave you up for good a moment ago; but He will never give you up so long as you breathe and live."

"Father," cried Eva, two neglected tears rolling down her cheeks, "I didn't want to be a thief—not at first. Ruth Random taught me to play it as a game. She said it was a game, but I knew better. She told me how clever I was, and she got me to like to do it. And she got me not to tell it in confession. She said I was acting for her and not for myself, and that it wasn't my sin at all."

"Did you believe her?"

"I tried to; but I felt all along there was something awfully wrong. Then she had me scared to death. She told me that if I ever opened my mouth about it to any one, her brother would kill me. He carries an awful knife. He takes it out whenever he gets angry."

"And now, Eva, are you ready to tell me everything?"

"Everything, Father, and I'll do anything you want me to. Father, are you going to expel me?"

"No, Eva, I'm not. Wait just one moment."

Father Carney went to the telephone and called up the Juvenile Court.

"Miss Shinners? Oh, it's you, is it? Say, I want Eva Fagan shielded from all publicity. I want her name kept out of the whole business. She's not to appear in the Juvenile Court at all.

What's that? You say it is impossible. You can't? Well, can you let the matter drop for six hours? All right; in the meantime I'm going to see how the impossible can be done. Thank you very much. Good-bye. See here, Michael," added Father Carney, as he hung up the receiver, "if you say a word about Eva Fagan to any living soul so as to give the idea she's in trouble, I'll skin you alive and boil what's left of you."

"Father, I won't even tell my mother."

"No, Eva," resumed Father Carney, on his return, "I'm going to keep you in our school, and I'm not even going to let your teacher know anything about this affair."

Eva was quite another girl. Her smiles were near to tears, it is true, but her face was already the face of a little girl who loves and hopes.

"Thank you, Father, thank you."

"And would you mind if I got you another home?"

"I'd be glad. I'll go wherever you want me. I don't like where I am now—and, Father, I want to make a general confession to-day, and I don't dare to go back to those people after that."

"You'll not go back. Now return to your class and get ready to be a leader in it. If Councilman Monahan and some of my friends can help me, I am going to see to it that you don't appear in the Juvenile Court. Good-bye, my dear; I'm going to be very busy now."

Within an hour, Councilman Monahan, the "king of the eighth ward," was seated in the

chair vacated by Eva. He was looked upon as an angel in a stiff hat by the widows and the poor who lived near him, as a demon in trousers by the reformers and the hill-top residents of the town. Father Carney told the councilman the whole story, insisting largely upon the fact that Eva was an orphan. As he repeated the episode about Eva's sudden change of front on being reminded of her dead father and mother, Mr. Monahan pulled out his handkerchief, an adequate one, much larger than Eva's, and wiped his eyes and blew his nose.

"Excuse me, Father," he said. "I can't stand that. By George, it might have happened to me. I was an orphan myself at her age. Poor little girl. Now, what can we do?"

"First," said Father Carney, "she's not to go back to those Random people."

"Oh, she's with them, is she? I should say she won't. That Random—Jim's his name—is no good. I've got him out of jail more than once. Mrs. Random gives me more trouble than any woman in my ward. She is always setting the women by the ears, and then they drag in the men; and I've got to settle the whole thing in the long run. Ruth Random is on the road to ruin. She likes feathers and clothes as much as she hates work. The boy, Robert, is running with a crowd of police characters. I know enough about him to send him up for six years. Oh, I know that family all right; I'll go down there before noon and I'll tell them that Eva is not to come back and if they make any

fuss about it, I'll break every bone in Jim Random's body."

Thus simply and directly did the king of the eighth ward settle the first difficulty.

"In the next place," resumed Father Carney, "I want this girl kept out of the Juvenile Court, and I want her name kept out of the paper. Eva will supply all the information the Court desires right in this office."

"I'm afraid," said the man of the people, "that I'll not be able to do much there. The fact is, those Juvenile Court people don't like me any more. They say I've butted in too much on their work; and I guess they're right. I did save several people from getting it, and some of them were no good. They put up a good story to me and I believed them. You know Judge William Henry Leeson, don't you?"

"I should say I do. He has always been most kind."

"He's a good man; he loves the poor, and he has influence; get him interested and he'll fix this thing. Well, I'm going after the Randoms now, and you needn't worry about them. You get the Judge."

Judge Leeson, caught on the telephone, was delighted to take a hand in the rehabilitation of Eva Fagan.

"Only," he added, "I must insist on one thing, Father Carney; you must consent to act as Eva's guardian."

"Good gracious, no."

"But you must, I insist."

It took Father Carney some time to make plain to the Judge—a non-Catholic and a Knight of Pythias—that a Jesuit priest could not act as a guardian.

"Well, I'll tell you what," said the genial Judge. "I'll become guardian myself, so as to get it out of the hands of that shyster who holds it now; but you will attend to the details."

On this basis the Father acceded, and before nightfall Eva was free of the Juvenile Court, made her general confession, got a new heart, a new guardian, and a new home, a home presided over by the good and motherly Mrs. Milton of East Fifth Avenue.

Such is the history of the little girl, now a leader in her class and an officer in the Sodality, who presented herself this November morning in Father Carney's office. It was her wont to call upon the Father whenever she could find a pretext.

Michael went on with the prize-fight.

"Good morning, Michael," said Father Donnell, a venerable priest, one of the pastors of St. Xavier's. "I see you are reading the paper. What's the news?"

"Ketchel won in the eleventh." Michael made answer.

"Indeed," said the old Father. "In the eleventh what?"

"In the eleventh round."

"Oh, I see. And—eh—what did he win?"

"The fight," snapped Michael.

"You seem to have very little to do here," continued Father Donnell, in his gentle way, "Is Father Carney in?"

"He's in his office, Father. Walk right in," added Michael, rising.

"Keep on reading your paper, my boy; but be careful what you read."

"I will, Father." And Michael took up the paper. As the sequel will show, Father Donnell's casual advice has much to do with this story. Michael was resolved to be careful; there was plenty of crime set forth on the page before him. Such accounts were not for a "careful reader"; Michael, therefore, set himself to examining the advertisements.

As Father Donnell entered, he was within a little of bumping into the fragile person of Eva Fagan, who was bowing herself out.

"Oh, excuse me, Father," she cried with a neat wriggle which averted the imminent collision, "good-bye, Father Carney, and thank you very much."

Her voice was sweet, her smile sunny.

"I just dropped in to pass the time of day," said Father Donnell. "You've a fine school, and I believe it goes by itself."

"Oh, yes!" said Father Carney. The undertones in his voice did not accord with his words.

"It's all in system," continued the older Father. "Once you get the machinery oiled it runs automatically."

"How true," assented Father Carney, in the same tone.

"You are like the ruler in the Gospel who says to this man, 'Come,' and he cometh; and to this man 'Do this,' and he doeth it."

"Exactly. Sit down, Father Donnell."

"And so you sit in your office, and listen to the sweet prattle of such little innocents as that little girl who just bowed herself out. The innocence of little children like that," continued the old man, his face lighting up with benevolence, "is their greatest charm."

"Just so, just so."

"And there's your office boy reading the paper——"

"Oh, he is—is he?"

"Oh, yes. Quite up in the prize-fights; and yourself seated here in state waiting for some one to come in and entertain you."

"Oh, I say," remonstrated Father Carney, "this school work isn't all cakes and ale."

"Maybe so." Here Father Donnell paused, cleared his throat, looked off into vacancy, and then added. "The general impression, Father Carney, is that you have a very easy time."

Father Carney was about to say something very much lacking in "repose." He was nettled. The Thanksgiving supper in addition to the regular routine of his duties had cost him much labor and several sleepless nights. The weariness of it was still on him. No doubt he would have said something very interesting and much to the point, but a sudden interruption brought the conversation to a fortunate if untimely issue; Michael came dashing into the office in an evident state of high excitement.

"Oh, Father Carney. Look! Did you see this?" And Michael put the newspaper on the desk and pointed with quivering finger to the following announcement:

GRAND POPULARITY CONTEST!
A THOUSAND DOLLAR GRAND PIANO.

To any lodge, school, society, or club sending in the highest number of coupons, the "Evening Starboard" will give this Grand Piano. The contest opens to-day, and will end on January 1st. Every issue of the "Starboard" contains one coupon. An opportunity for a lodge, school, society, or club to get a thousand dollar piano may never come again. Well Begun is Half Done. Therefore begin at once. Cut out each coupon, write or stamp the name of the organization you are working for on its face, and send it by mail or messenger to the Contest Editor of the "Starboard." Coupons *may* be sent in at any time. But on each Monday *all* coupons of the previous week must be handed in; otherwise they will not count. The progress of this popularity contest will be announced in the columns of the "Starboard" every Wednesday.

Read the "Starboard." It costs a cent and is sold everywhere.

* * * *

"Father," said Michael, "wouldn't it be great if we could get that piano for our main hall? You know we need a piano badly for it."

"So we do, Michael," replied Father Carney, running his hand through his hair. "There's a piano at Werner's for four hundred and fifty dollars which I've had my eye on. It was worth nine hundred when new. They used it for exhibition purposes five or six times, and so, while the price is very low, it's practically as good a piano as when it was brand new."

"Why don't you buy it, then?" queried Father Donnell.

"For the very simple reason that I have no money for such a purpose."

"It's lots easier to get this popularity contest piano," put in Michael. "Just look at the way we beat the town two years ago when St. Xavier School won the piano now in St. Nicholas Hall. We won hands down; and what we did before, we can do again."

"Undoubtedly, Michael," said Father Donnell clearing his throat, "you are right. It will help to keep you busy, and all Father Carney has to do is to say the word, and you others will do the rest. It's quite simple, Father Carney."

"Oh, yes," assented the Director. "Everything looks simple when it works out right."

"Anyhow," continued Father Donnell, "the work will not fall on you."

"Certainly not; all I need to do is look on," assented Father Carney in a vein of sarcasm entirely lost upon both hearers. "But I don't think we should enter St. Xavier School in another piano contest. It has won its piano already."

"How about the Young Ladies' Sodality?" asked Michael. "They're hustlers, and the school children will help them."

"Not a bad idea at all, Michael. They've nothing special on hand until January eighth, and they really like to have something going on. Just wait; I'll call up the prefect."

Five minutes later, Father Carney returned from the telephone booth.

"Well, Michael; it's arranged. The Young Ladies' Sodality will enter the contest."

"Whoop!" cried Michael.

"And," continued the Director, "if it goes the way it did before, I've no doubt we'll win without very much trouble."

"Of course, we'll win," cried Michael.

"Maybe so; but I've a feeling in my bones that there are going to be all sorts of complications."

"Who's afraid?" cried Michael, head in air and eyes flashing.

"In any case," Father Carney added, "it's going to mean work, plenty of work, and work every night."

"I'll be here every night, Father."

"Thank you, Michael; and I'll be here, too, to look on, you know."

Father Donnell held up his hand to command attention. Instead of speaking at once, he looked into space for several seconds, cleared his throat, and then——

"Father Carney, you have the right idea. If you look on, your presence will be enough. I congratulate you in advance. To you, the

whole matter with such workers will be quite simple."

"Perhaps," suggested Father Carney, "you'd like to take my place."

"Any time you need me, Father Carney, you may call on me."

"I'll remember that, Father Donnell. And now, Michael, here's a cent. Run out and buy an "Evening Starboard," the early edition, and start the contest with the first coupon. Meantime, I'll go round to the twenty-three classrooms and look on—that is, I'll start the children at once."

Michael was back in a trice, and, cutting out the coupon and writing upon it, "The Y. L. S. of St. Xavier," started a contest which, though he little knew it at the moment, was to provide him with a month made up of incessant work, thrilling excitement, and undreamed-of adventure.

## CHAPTER II

*In Which Michael Goes Home, and the First Skirmishes of the Contest are Narrated.*

"I say, Mother, we're going to enter the piano contest," cried Michael, bursting into the room where Mrs. Desmond, seated at her sewing-machine, was, as usual, working hard for the benefit of her three children, Michael, Charles, and Josephine. It was five o'clock, and twilight had set in.

"I've heard all about it, Michael," said Mrs. Desmond, closing the machine. "Charles and Josephine couldn't talk of anything else from the time they came home from school till they went out to scour the neighborhood for coupons. I told them to be back before dark. They ought to be in by now."

"The whole school is working like a house on fire," Michael continued. "On the way home just now, I met all sorts of children at every street corner, and they were holding up every man that passed. Every one of the kids made the same speech. It was, 'Say, Mister, are you through with the "Starboard"? Please let me have the coupon.' A lot of the men were falling for it, too. One girl on Sixth and Broadway had a pair of shears—a little bob-haired girl in the fifth grade. She was doing a land-office business. If people said that they hadn't read the 'Starboard' yet, she'd up and

say, 'Well, you don't need that coupon part anyhow. Please, Mister, let me cut it out.' I stood and watched her for five minutes, and I'm blessed if she didn't get eight coupons while I was looking."

"That's just like the St. Xavier School children," remarked the mother; "they are full of enthusiasm."

"Of course, we are," said Michael, complacently. "St. Xavier School is always on top. And we're going to win that piano sure."

"Don't be too sure, my boy. I had a hand myself in the piano contest two years ago. It began as a popularity contest, and was really a straight affair. But toward the end, people began to bargain a little, to buy coupons and to sell them. If it had gone on four weeks longer, I'm quite sure it would have become a question as to who could put up the most money to buy the piano."

"Let them buy," cried Michael; "we'll beat them anyhow."

"Beat whom, Michael?"

"Beat anybody—any club, any society, any anything."

"There you are, my boy, boasting again. Remember this, if it comes to buying a piano, I should not care to see St. Xavier win."

"What!" cried the scandalized Michael.

"I mean what I say. To win it in that way would mean that you'd spend on the contest at the very least as much as the retail price of the piano. Father Carney could use money for better purposes than that; and St. Xavier is not out for that sort of popularity."

"All the same we're going to win." persisted Michael. "Say, Ma, I'm awful hungry. Let me have some bread and butter, please."

"Suppose you wait a few minutes. We'll have supper then. Ah, here they come." As Mrs. Desmond spoke, that sweet and sacred thing, the mother-expression, came upon her face. It always came at the sound of her children's approach. She had been a widow for eight years, rich in the possession of three children, poor in everything else."

The family lived on the third floor of a house on Baum Street. They had a suite of three rooms; a kitchen and dining-room combined, a living-room also doing service as a sleeping-room for Mrs. Desmond and nine year old Josephine, and a third room for the two boys. Mrs. Desmond, helped by the very small salary of Master Michael, contrived through the skilled use of her needle to make both ends meet. The wolf was often at the door, but got no further.

The three children were always neatly dressed. They were poor, indeed, but made comfortable through a mother's daily work and almost nightly vigils. There was order in that humble home. Much to Michael's disgust, the children were not allowed to run the streets at night. In vain did the neighboring youth clamor without, and give those mysterious shrieks and calls which are a part of the masonry of boyhood. Michael and Charles remained at home. They studied and read until nine o'clock; then came family prayers and bed.

"Look," cried Charles, elbowing Josephine

aside; "I've got fifteen coupons. Count 'em—fifteen."

"Say, Ma," said Josephine, a pretty, rather fragile child, violet of eye and delicate of complexion, "Charles was awful rough. I've got only twelve. But he was mean. He ran ahead of me and got some of my friends to give him their coupons; and when I got to the Durkins' house before him and rang the bell, he came along and just as Mrs. Durkin opened the door, he shoved me back and said, 'Mrs. Durkin won't you please give me the coupon in the 'Starboard'? He got it. He's too mean to live."

"Aw! I ain't neither," growled Charles. "She got ahead of me with two of my best friends, and got 'em to promise her their coupons every day. When it comes to foxy ways——"

"Josephine!" remonstrated the mother.

The young lady just warned had opened her mouth to its widest, and put her tongue out with a viciousness and energy which expressed beyond all power of words her sentiments regarding her dear brother, who, being in the advance, could not see these lively demonstrations. Thus warned, she allowed her face to resume its natural expression, save for a slight wrinkling of the nose and a pouting lip.

"She's sticking out her tongue at me, is she?" Charles went on tranquilly. "I don't care; she *is* foxy."

"That's no reason," put in Michael, "why you should be rough with her. Why don't you hit somebody your size?"

"She pinched me," said Charles.

"O-o-o-h," cried Josephine. "What a whopper! I just caught you by the arm."

"Well, it pinched. After this you don't serve my Mass any more."

Master Charles, it should be explained, was, like his old brother, quite pious, though in a different way. Michael was devout but reticent. He said little. Charles was quite effusive. Every night it was his custom, when all had gone to bed and the lights went out, to go to each room, a bottle of holy water in his hand, and sprinkle the beds and, as sometimes happened, the occupants profusely. He had a special altar of his own in the boys' sleeping-room, and, once a week, when Michael was not at home, would shut himself in and "say Mass." What ceremonial he used has not to this day been revealed.

Josephine, allowed by special privilege to serve on extraordinary occasions, could tell. But her tongue was under interdict. She had crossed her heart and done other solemn things to make stronger her promise that the "rites" should never by her be revealed to mortal ear. Even the vestments of the youthful cleric were more or less of a mystery. His mother had made him a surplice and stole: but Charles himself had, in secrecy, worked out other vestments—a maniple and some wonderful contrivance made out of thick paper which was probably intended for a chasuble. But, save Josephine, no one had ever seen the youth fully vested.

Michael, returning once while the rites were going on had essayed the keyhole: it was plugged. He tried to open the door: it was barricaded. Josephine could reveal much. But despite the tradition regarding the gentle female sex, she was quite able to keep a secret. She accepted Charles' rites and vestments without questioning. Charles was an altar boy; he served Mass every morning, and, therefore, ought to know what he was doing. But, Josephine often asked herself, why did Charles always wear a pair of spectacles when saying Mass? This question remained unanswered. And yet there were just two people in the world who could have satisfied Josephine on this point —Mrs. Desmond and Father Carney.

Charles, be it known, had in his first days of serving at the altar conceived a deep admiration for the mild, gentle, and saintly Father Donnell. Admiration, as the days went on, had deepened into love, and love had developed into imitation. Father Donnell's honest and innocent eyes looked out upon the world from behind a pair of spectacles. It was accordingly one of the dearest wishes of Charles' heart to wear spectacles too.

In vain had he pleaded with his mother. She assured him, not without reason as the advancing years proved, that he would wear spectacles soon enough: the boy's eyes were poor. However, by way of a compromise, she presented him with a pair of plain glasses mounted in a cheap frame, on condition that he should use them only when engaged in the secret rites of his weekly Mass. These solemn ceremonies

generally went beyond an hour, and before them, during them, after them, Master Charles with fine histrionic ability imagined himself to be Father Donnell. Mrs. Desmond, immediately before and after these services, found it next to impossible to keep a straight face. Many a time she was obliged to rush incontinently into the kitchen.

Whenever, also, Charles took part in any church duty, he again became Father Donnell. Father Carney was not slow to surprise the boy's secret, and no less slow to avail himself of it. The reverend jokester contrived now and then to bring the boy and the priest together, and stood off to study the effect.

"Charles," he once said, as the devout acolyte, his thanksgiving after communion completed, was about to leave through the church, "would you mind asking Father Donnell at what hour he is going to say Mass next week, so you can arrange to serve it? He's coming now."

"Thank you, Father Carney, I will."

Charles advanced and put himself in Father Donnell's path.

"Good morning, Father."

The venerable old man raised his eyes, gazed absently for a moment on his young interlocutor, drew up his head, composed his face, cleared his throat, and then, after a second's pause, responded.

"Good morning, Charles. Is there anything I can do for you?"

Then Charles raised *his* eyes, gazed almost, although not quite, absently on the object of his

heart's adoration, drew up his head, composed his face, cleared his throat, and finally after a moment's pause, responded.

"Yes, Father; please, let me know at what hour you say Mass next week."

But Father Carney had not waited to hear these words. He had almost run away. Such little episodes as this made him think that life was really worth living. When, therefore, Charles on the present occasion informed Josephine that she was banished forever from all participation in the mystic rites, he at once, by a natural transition bethought himself of Father Donnell. His face changed on the instant. Excitement was succeeded by a placid demeanor. No living person could be more benevolent than Charles looked.

"Oh, you needn't get mad about a little thing like this," protested Josephine. "I've kept all your secrets."

Charles was now standing very erect, his hands were clasped in front; he seemed to be looking through Josephine. Then, after a moment's pause, he cleared his throat.

"Josephine," he said. "I've been wanting in-in-ahem-consideration. (At this point Mrs. Desmond bolted into the kitchen.) Consider that last-er-that last remark unsaid."

"I wonder what dictionary you use?" queried Michael.

"I'll tell you what, Charles," cried Josephine. "After this I'm going to give you half my coupons."

"Bully for you, shouted Charles, forgetting

all about Father Donnell. "And after this you can serve every week."

While Mrs. Desmond was putting on the dishes, the three children artlessly discussed the contest from every angle.

"Charles," said Josephine, "there was a funny thing happened this afternoon on Pioneer Street when I was coming home from school."

"There's *always* something funny happening on Pioneer Street," interpolated Michael. "But if it hasn't got anything to do with this contest, we don't want to hear it."

Josephine looked at him with no little reproof on her innocent features. As if she could think of anything else! She was about to stick out her tongue, when a look from her mother caused her to think better of it.

"Of course, it's about the contest. You see I was walking down Pioneer Street with Jennie Jenkins and Rosie Gildea, my very dearest friends——"

"Cut out the sentiment," interrupted Michael, "and give us the story."

"Now, Michael," remonstrated the mother, "don't be rude to your sister."

"Did you get that?" queried Charles, in Michael's ear.

"And," continued Josephine, "James Connell was coming up the street."

"Brother Fat," explained Michael to his mother.

"Yes, Brother Fat," assented Josephine. "Between us girls and him was an ash barrel on the pavement. All of a sudden, a man came

out of Moloney's house, and in a kind of a way as if he wasn't thinking of what he was doing, he threw a newspaper into that old ash barrel."

"Great Scott!" ejaculated Michael. "He did! What was the man's name? Does he belong to St. Xavier?"

"Oh pshaw! We'll never get the story if you keep on butting in," growled Charles. "For goodness sake, go on, Josephine. I'm sure something happened."

"I don't know who he was. Anyhow when he threw it in, Jennie Jenkins gave a scream and ran for that barrel. She saw it before Brother Fat. But he started for it, too, one teeny-weeny moment after Jennie did. Then Brother Fat yelled out 'Stand back: that paper's mine;' but I reckon Jennie didn't hear. She got there just before Brother Fat, and made a reach for that paper. I guess it must have been away down in the barrel; for the first thing you know in she went head first. And what do you think James did?"

"What?" cried all, breathlessly.

"She was just about half way in and her legs were a-going the way she was trying to get a hold, and that James Connell gave the barrel a shake and down she went till you couldn't see nothing but her shoes a-sticking out, and they were a-kicking so hard that we didn't know what to do. Rosie Gildea tried to catch hold of her and got an awful kick on her fingers. And then James Connell got awful white, and said 'She'll choke to death; her head's in the ashes.' "

"Didn't anybody have sense enough to do anything?" queried Michael, in great disgust.

"Well, by that time everybody on Pioneer Street was out, and the girls were all screaming, and people were rushing over from Broadway. We were so jammed we couldn't move. And there were Jennie's shoes kicking away harder than ever, and everybody yelling and shouting and pushing?"

"I suppose you let her stay there and suffocate," said Michael.

"We didn't do anything; we couldn't. We were too crowded. Then Lieutenant Gildea, Rosie's father, came through that crowd. You just ought to have seen his elbows a-working. He was there before you knew it. He just reached in, got a good hold on Jennie and fetched her out. And, do you know, she had that paper pressed to her bosom with both hands. The Lieutenant turned her and put her on her feet. She had a face on her like you had, Michael, the time you tried to be the bones in the minstrel show. And her mouth was full of ashes.

"'It's mine!' she hollered as soon as she could speak.

"'Of course, it's yours,' said James Connell. 'I intended to give you the coupon anyway.' And then," continued Josephine, "a funny thing happened. The patrol wagon came right up to where we were standing, and when James Connell saw it, he ran through that crowd as if there were nobody there at all."

"I suppose," said Michael, "that he is running yet."

"Then Lieutenant Gildea told the policemen who came with the wagon that there wasn't anybody to be carried off, and they drove away."

"So," said Michael, "Jennie Jenkins got the coupon."

"Oh, no," answered Josephine, in a casual way, "You see it was the *morning* paper."

## CHAPTER III

*In Which the Troubles of Michael are Multiplied by Seventeen, and Father Carney Goes Without Lunch.*

WHEN Father Carney entered the office on the following morning, he found Michael to be the center of a tumultuous crowd —mostly girls. All were flourishing coupons, all were pressing about the youthful dignitary. There was great distress on Michael's face. It was a difficult thing for a boy of fourteen, who happened, moreover, to entertain a strong distaste for girls, to listen to a dozen of them talking and clamoring at once.

"Well, now!" cried Father Carney, standing erect and frowning in the doorway.

At the sound of his voice, the tumult ceased; every face grew composed; one girl, the noisiest and most energetic of the group but a moment before, quick to grasp the possibilities of the situation, made a little bob to the Father, put on a smile that was sweetness itself, and said in dulcet tones:

"Good morning, Father."

Then all took up the theme, and burst out into, "Good morning, Father."

The office now looked like a Sunday-school.

"Good morning, children," returned Father Carney. "Are you mobbing my office boy?"

"They came pretty near it, Father," put in

Michael, arising. His face was red, his hair tousled. In moments of trouble, Michael was wont to run his hand through his chestnut locks. "They won't keep any sort of order. They push and gabble and press round a fellow something awful."

The girls all wore hurt expressions; many of them gazed at Michael with strong disfavor.

"What do they want?" asked the Director.

"They want me to take down their names and the number of coupons they've got—and they all want to have it done at the same time. This thing's been going on for an hour. I've got rid of more than half of them already. And, Father, I'm just taking down the names of those who bring in at least five coupons."

"Very well, Michael; I'll help you. Now, girls, all of you get out into the vestibule, quick; and stay there for further orders."

"Very good," continued Father Carney, when the order was obeyed. "Now, let all girls with five coupons enter, single file."

As the procession came, one by one, through the doorway, Father Carney collected the coupons and called out their possessors' names while Michael with facile pencil took their record.

"Back to your classes, girls. Next, those who have six coupons."

Another procession was duly registered. Finally, after a number of such orders, there were three girls left, Alice Morrow with twenty coupons, Jennie Jenkins, with twenty-five, and Eva Fagan with thirty-three.

"Father," said Jennie, as she handed over her collection, "did you hear that a patrol wagon came after me yesterday? I fell into an ash-barrel."

"They should have sent a laundry wagon for you," volunteered Michael.

"I didn't mind the ashes much," continued Jenny, "but when I saw that the paper I got out of the barrel was a *morning* paper, I just couldn't help crying."

"My pa and my sisters and a lot of people in our house are helping me," put in Alice Morrow. "Oh, Father, I can see that piano up in our hall right now."

"And how did you get yours, Eva?"

"I got little Catherine Norman to help me," said Eva. "She's only five, but she's the cutest girl you ever saw. We went from house to house along Fifth Street. I rang the bell and when the door was opened, little Catherine would say, 'Kind lady, won't you please give me a coupon?' She got one every time."

"But suppose it was a man who came to the door?" queried the amused Director.

"Oh, then, she would say, 'Kind sir, won't you please give me a coupon?' A lot of 'em bought papers to please little Catherine. And whenever she got a coupon she bowed—bending almost to the floor—and said. 'Thank you, good night, and pleasant dreams.' Nearly all of them begged her to come back."

"And what did she say when they begged her to come back?"

"She didn't say anything," answered Eva. "You see, we didn't coach her up for that part.

But she smiled. I'd pinch her, and she'd smile. Whenever I pinch her she knows that she's to smile."

"Upon my word," cried Father Carney, "you'll be a theatrical manager some day, Eva. And how do you get her to bow?"

"I catch her by the ear; but of course, I don't hurt her."

Father Carney dismissed each of the three girls with a picture as a souvenir of their heroic efforts.

"Father," said Michael. "We've got over three thousand coupons in already. The Brothers sent down the boys' coupons—over twelve hundred. A lot of the little children are bringing in all kinds of coupons; grocery coupons, china store coupons, and what not. It's a wonder they won't get things right. They heard enough about it yesterday to understand."

"Take anything they bring, Michael; and always say 'thank you,' and look pleasant. See if you can't smile. All these children like to have their work appreciated."

"All right, Father, I will. If they keep it up," he continued as he slipped a rubber band around one hundred coupons and placed it on a stack of similar packages, "we're sure to win."

"Don't be too sure, Michael: the Ancient Order of Sunflowers, I am told, have entered the contest."

"The what?" gasped Michael.

"The Sunflowers: any number of lawyers and politicians of the city are members. What

can we do if all the wards and all the saloons thereof are against us?"

"We can fight," answered Michael, bravely.

"And then there's the Eastern Stars in the contest, too."

"Vaudeville actors—theatrical people?" queried Michael.

"Not exactly; they're an organization of women, something like little sisters of the Masons; they'll get all the secret organizations to help them."

"Whew!" cried Michael. "Anyhow," he added, brightening, "we can get the Knights of Columbus on our side. And I'll bet our Young Ladies' Sodality can put it all over those Eastern Lights, or whatever you call 'em."

"I beg pardon," said a young lady of not more than twenty-one, entering the office, "but is Father Carney in?"

"Yes, Miss," responded the Director, pleasantly, "I am Father Carney, and at your service."

It was the Director's wont to be reserved with strange visitors—reserved—and, quite often, abrupt. Peddlers, book-agents, beggars, and schemers had driven him to this outward coldness. But as he greeted the young lady now before him, he was cordiality itself. She was, he perceived at once, very timid and perceptibly frightened.

"Father," she said, "my name is Miss Vivian Tennison. In this city I am almost a stranger. One of your Sodality girls asked me to come to you: and—and so I'm here."

Miss Tennison wore very sweetly the mod-

esty becoming in youth. She was pretty, and, as her face showed, intensely earnest.

"And now that you are here," said Father Carney pleasantly, "allow me to assure you that you are welcome. Possibly you wish to see me privately?"

"It's about the contest, Father."

"Oh, I see! Well, Michael here and myself are both running the contest. Perhaps you have coupons for us."

"Father I—I'm in it myself."

"Say, you ain't a society or a lodge, are you?" asked Michael.

"And I want you, Father," continued the young lady with a deprecating smile at Michael, "to help me if you can."

"We're in it ourselves," said the Father.

"No, Father, it's only started. Besides you're not a domestic anyhow."

"A domestic!" faltered the Father.

"Yes. A domestic. There's a three hundred and fifty dollar piano for the most popular domestic, and another for the most popular saleslady, and another for the most popular bookkeeper, and another for a stenographer, and another for a teacher, and another for a nurse, and another for a telephone girl, and another for a factory girl—eight pianos in all."

"Do you mean to say that the 'Evening Starboard' has changed its contest since yesterday?" cried the Director. Michael was rubbing his hair furiously.

"'Starboard?' No; it's the 'Evening Journal.' Look!"

And the young woman pulled out the morning paper, and pointed to a half-page ad. Michael, forgetful of the conventions, jumped from his chair and rushed over to see for himself.

"Good gracious!" said Father Carney. "Michael, there's a good deal of the fat in the fire now—And what do you want us to do for you, Miss Tennison?"

"I want to work for and exchange with you. Get all the 'Journal' coupons you can marked *Domestic*, and I'll trade you 'Starboard' coupons for them. Here's a hundred 'Starboard' coupons now. You take them and you'll owe me one hundred."

"Take them, Father," said Michael, eagerly.

"Very well; I agree." And Father Carney took formal possession of the package. "Michael, take Miss Te-eh-Miss——"

"Vivian Tennison," supplemented the young lady, now beaming with joy.

"Precisely. Take Miss Tennison's name and address. And, Miss Tennison, if you call here to-morrow, we'll give you your coupons, and be ready for a new deal. Good-bye, and good luck. I admire your pluck and your quickness in getting a start. It's a pity you don't belong to my Sodality. You are the sort of person I like to have at hand."

"Good-bye, Father; I'm a convert, and don't know much about Catholic Societies. But if you'd let me know something about it, I might join."

"Very well; be down here next Sunday at two-fifteen in the afternoon, and I'll put you

in charge of one of the young ladies. You can see for yourself, then. Just now, I see a very busy day. Your news brings work that must be done at once. Good-bye, glad to have met you."

"Michael," resumed the Father, when Miss Tennison had left, "first of all, tell the head Sister to have all the girls assembled in the hall at precisely ten o'clock, tell the head Brother to have the boys assembled at ten fifteen."

"Yes, Father; I guess you're going to start them on the other coupons so we can trade."

"Precisely, Michael; and I haven't time to go round to the various classes. In the next——"

"Extra! 'Starboard' Extra!" boomed a deep voice outside. "Read all about the great piano contest."

"Michael," began Father Carney, reaching into his pocket for a cent, "go out and——"

But Michael was gone. He came back with equal alacrity.

"Oh, look," he cried.

The first page was devoted to an announcement of the piano contest.

"Ah!" said Father Carney, running his eye over the announcement. "Michael, *all* the fat is in the fire."

"Is it, Father? What fat, in what fire?"

"Listen, Michael, to what the 'Evening Starboard' has to say. 'Our popularity contest announced yesterday, has met with a most flattering response. Any number of organizations have already entered in the great

popularity contest. Among them The Ancient Order of Sunflowers, The Eastern Stars, The White Mice, The Young Ladies' Sodality of St. Xavier Church, The Don't Worry Club, and several others. The contest will be close and warm. However, a number of our readers have remarked that no individual has a chance to win a piano. We welcome all suggestions. We love to please our readers. We have already acted on the suggestion and are happy to state that beginning this afternoon, we offer in each isue of the 'Starboard' coupons for a $350.00 piano for the most popular lady as follows:

1. The most popular lady residing down town.
2. The most popular lady residing in Clifton.
3. The most popular lady residing in Cumminsville.
4. The most popular lady residing in Corryville.
5. The most popular lady residing on Mt. Adams.
6. The most popular lady residing on Price Hill.
7. The most popular lady residing in Avondale.
8. The most popular lady residing on Walnut Hills.
9. The most popular lady residing on Mt. Auburn.'

"Then follow the street boundaries for each of those districts. Each winner is to get a three hundred and fifty dollar piano. Michael,

we're in for it. How I wish 'twere Christmas, and all were well. Hustle, Michael, and get those girls assembled: there's only fifteen minutes left."

Father Carney took up the telephone receiver, and was presently in communication with Miss Lilly McCabe, prefect of The Young Ladies' Sodality:

"Good morning, Lilly. Did you see the papers? Well, there are seventeen more contests for pianos starting—eight in the 'Evening Journal' and nine in the 'Evening Starboard.' Do you know what that means? It means that we'll have to handle all coupons, that our school-office will become an exchange market, that we'll have to work night and day. Are you afraid? Do you want to back out?"

"No, Father," came the reply. "I'm willing to work every morning at your office from nine to eleven; and I've already got six girls to come down with me every evening."

"Six!" cried Father Carney. "Six won't do. We want at least twelve every night. It's going to be something awful."

"Oh, I don't think so, Father."

"Glad you don't. Well, good-bye."

As Father Carney hung up the receiver, Michael and Jerry, the janitor, entered. There was a slight discoloration under Jerry's right eye.

"Good morning, Father. Here's a bunch of coupons—about fifty. I got 'em easy. Everybody was nice, except one. He's an Irish socialist. Did you ever see an Irish socialist, Father? They always get up on the wrong

side of their beds. This fellow—his name's Jim Davis—"

"Oh," cried Michael, "I know him."

"And he lives near Michael on Baum Street. When I asked for a coupon over at Dana's saloon, he said some things about the school and you. It made me pretty hot."

"You look funny, Jerry. What's the matter with your eye?"

"He done it, the spalpeen. He hit me before I knew it."

"And you turned the other cheek?"

"Oh," cried Michael, in ecstasy, "you ought to see the other fellow! All Jerry needs is a piece of raw beef; but Jim Davis needs a dentist and a doctor, and a nurse and a couple of holidays. I saw his mug this morning when I passed his house."

"I had to hire a cab to send him home," said Jerry, regretfully. "But it was worth while. Five other socialists came right over and handed me their coupons when I saw Jim Davis off in the cab."

"Well, Jerry, for the rest of the contest, you had better keep out of the saloons; there'll be fighting enough, I'm afraid."

"Very well, Father," said Jerry, meekly.

"If any one calls to see me, Michael," pursued Father Carney, "tell 'em I won't be down till about a quarter to eleven. I am going to give fifteen minutes to the boys and as much to the girls to show them the new turn in this contest. Michael, I'm half sorry we've gone in; I feel like going to bed."

"Say, Jerry," said Michael, with some

anxiety, "what's the matter with Father Carney? He's scared. Do you think he's getting old?"

"Sure," answered Jerry, with withering scorn, "it's the likes of you that thinks people is getting old because they've got sense enough to look ahead, and not count their chickens before they're laid. Some of you kids are just looking for a chance to learn your grannies how to milk ducks. You look before you leap, you——"

"Just so, Jerry," put in Michael, "like a fellow I know who paid a dollar for cab hire last night in order to get five coupons!"

Jerry looked at Michael fixedly, and then with much dignity left the room.

Within thirty-five minutes, Father Carney returned. An expression of dismay came upon his face as he glanced into the office. In fact, he was minded not to enter. Michael, with much ruffled hair, was explaining to some thirty young ladies that Father Carney could not be sent for, that he was addressing the boys in the hall on the fourth floor, and that he might be expected at any moment.

"We're in a hurry," cried a young lady wearing strong eye-glasses.

"Oh," said Michael, "in St. Xavier parish school we're all in a hurry."

"Oh, that office boy!" said a woman under her breath.

And then Father Carney with a "Good morning, ladies," entered, having first ascertained that there were present to his personal knowledge three bookkeepers, one domestic,

three stenographers, five telephone girls, two salesladies, two clerks, and among the unknown callers one strongly featured woman of middle age upon whose face was written in unmistakable terms the legend, "Votes for Women."

"Good morning, Father," came the chorus. Then twenty-five of the thirty-four present—four more had entered after Father Carney—all began to talk at once.

The Director of Schools raised his hand.

"Those of you," he said, "who come in connection with these popularity contests will kindly step into my office. I really think I know what you want already."

Of those present, all but one promptly crowded in after the Director of Schools. The exception was a little old lady who explained to Michael that she wanted to get Father Carney's advice about making a will.

"What you want," suggested Michael, "is a lawyer."

Also, the little old lady had great trouble with her heart.

"You should see a doctor," said Michael. "Father Carney never prescribes for heart trouble."

The little old lady was not to be put off. She lived on the hill, and her heart was so weak she feared walking home.

"Oh," said Michael, "what you really want is a nickel, isn't it?"

Michael sent the old lady away quite content.

"It was worth a nickel," he soliloquized, "to

save Father Carney the time she would have taken."

Meanwhile, the Director of Schools was entering into alliance with the thirty-four women. The trading post was established. It was twelve o'clock before these negotiations came to an end.

"By Jove," said Father Carney, as the "Votes for Women" candidate, last of all, went out. "I think if I make a sprint for it, I'll get over in time for lunch."

Seizing his hat, he hurried out, only to find awaiting him and surrounding Michael seven school-teachers. Father Carney took no lunch that day.

## CHAPTER IV

*Father Carney Becomes a Diplomatist, and Creates a Sensation.*

"GOOD evening, Father Carney," came a chorus of voices as the Young Ladies' Sodality Director entered the office.

"Good evening, girls. I see you are all here."

"Fourteen, not counting myself—all armed with scissors," put in Michael. "Fourteen—count 'em; and Eva Fagan is waiting to see you in your office."

"Father," said Lilly McCabe, a very tall, graceful young lady, in appearance every inch a prefect, "what's the matter? You look ill."

"I feel," said Father Carney, "as if I'd been through a hot campaign, instead of beginning one. Since nine this morning I've had personal interviews with forty women who want to get into this contest, I've had three couples who suddenly discovered that they wanted to get married, I've spent half an hour in persuading an hysterical woman not to commit suicide, referred one man to a lawyer, two women to a doctor, and—but what's the use talking? It never rains but it pours."

The young ladies meantime were busy cutting, sorting, counting, and wrapping coupons.

"Eva is waiting to see you, Father," said Michael.

"Oh, that's so; excuse me for a minute."

"When you've finished with Eva, Father," said the prefect, "I'd like to have a word with you, too,"

"Very good," said Father Carney, as he went into his private office. "Good evening, Eva. What can I do for you, my girl?"

"Father, I came to ask if I couldn't come over every night and help. I'd just dearly love to."

Eva had risen on Father Carney's entrance. There was an eager wistfulness on her face.

"I don't like little girls to be out at night."

"But, Father, I live just round the corner almost, on Fifth Street. It's only two minutes' walk. You see, I can get here every night at seven and put out the scissors and arrange the tables, and have everything ready before the young ladies come. And besides I can tidy up the office; boys are no good at that sort of thing."

"But what about your studies, Eva?"

"Father, I'm head of my class, and I think I can keep it. I can get my lessons before supper and in the mornings. I do so want to help."

"Thank you, Eva; if you do not neglect your studies and other duties, it will be a pleasure to have you around. Come with me.—Ladies," continued Father Carney, throwing open the door and bringing Eva forward, "allow me to introduce the caretaker of our bond exchange, Miss Eva Fagan. She'll tidy up before and after each nightly meeting and

make herself generally useful. I think you can rely on her."

"Shake hands, Eva," cried Miss McCabe, the prefect. "You look the part all right. You're just the sort of a girl who knows how to put everything where it belongs. We'll have to make you an honorary member of the Young Ladies' Sodality."

"Come in, Lilly; and you, Eva, get to work and clear away all that truck."

"Look here, Father," began Lilly, "I'd like to know right off who's running this contest?"

"Why," answered Father Carney with some caution, "I thought I was."

"Yes; but when you're not around, who's in authority then?"

"Oh! so there's been a row already, has there?"

"No; but there will be pretty soon. And it's going to be with that office boy."

"Who? Michael?"

"Yes, Michael. He started some of the girls to working before I came, and assigned them their duties. He mortally insulted Jane Sullivan a few minutes ago."

"Indeed! What happened?"

"Jane wanted to fix her curls and asked him for a mirror. And he told her that life was too serious just now to be talking about mirrors, that people who were really in earnest thought more of their work and less of their faces, and he ended with advising her to go and chase herself around the block."

"Did she take the advice?"

"No; the poor girl just shriveled up, and went on cutting coupons."

"And is this the extent of Master Michael's guilt?"

"Oh, no; he's ordering everybody around. Why, when I stopped work to telephone one of the girls, he had the face to tell me I was losing my time. I was so astonished and mad that I didn't say anything. If he says anything like that again, I think I'll put him over my knee."

Miss Lilly McCabe was making no idle boast; she was fully capable, morally and physically, of carrying out her threat.

"I see," said Father Carney, "that you're not well acquainted with Michael Desmond."

"I'm not anxious to be," said Lilly, tartly. The prefect, by blood of the fighting race, looked for the moment like a militant. Her face was set and lowering.

"That's because you don't know him, Lilly. Did I tell you that it was Michael who suggested our going into this contest?"

"You don't say!"

"Yes; and he's been working on it ever since. I'll wager he didn't sleep two hours last night, and this morning he was serving six o'clock Mass."

"The poor little boy!" cried Lilly. The tense expression was gone: Lilly was now beaming with sympathy.

"And the boy is chock full of energy. He is more anxious to win than I am. Where there's lots of energy there's likely to be lots

of friction. You girls will never go to sleep so long as Michael's around."

"I begin to understand now," said Lilly, breaking into a smile. Lilly was whole-souled both in wrath and in tenderness.

"Oh, of course," continued the wily Director, "Michael is a bit tart in his way of talking, and he likes to do the bossing, too. But after all, wouldn't you rather have a vigorous, energetic boy like that around than one of those ordinary, careless fellows who think of nothing but dodging work?"

"You're right, Father."

"And remember; Michael is volunteering to do all this work. By rights he's in the office from eight till four. To-day he came at seven and remained till five-thirty, and now he's here again. In fact, Michael is one of the best friends of the Young Ladies' Sodality."

"I see," said Lilly. "I'll remember him at Christmas."

"Michael," called the reverend diplomat, "come in. Now, my boy, this is Miss Lilly McCabe, prefect of the Young Ladies' Sodality."

"Shake hands, Michael," cried Lilly, enthusiastically. She put some of that enthusiasm into her clasp.

"Ouch!" yelled Michael. "Glad to meet you, Miss."

"After this, Michael, you will allow Miss McCabe to superintend the work of the young ladies who come here at night."

"All right, Father."

"And if you really feel anxious to boss anybody, you can take it out on little Eva."

"Oh, pshaw! Who said I wanted to boss?" remonstrated Michael. "Those girls came here to-night and I just started 'em. That's all."

"I don't blame Michael in the least," said the beaming prefect.

"Did you advise one of them to go and chase herself around the block?"

"I was only kidding."

"Well, my boy, be polite to every one. Every decent boy respects all women, even women who can't go half an hour without shouting for a mirror."

"Michael and I will manage to pull together," said Lilly. "He's just the sort of boy we want. Shake again, Michael."

"No you don't!" said the cautious youth.

The two went out like a re-united brother and sister. Miss McCabe had entered to insist upon her authority in the contest. She left the room perfectly content, with the question very imperfectly answered. Father Carney was sometimes a diplomat.

An hour passed. The young women had snipped and sorted every coupon. Eva, with a deftness which caused all to gaze and wonder, was putting everything to rights. It was time to go. But what had happened to Father Carney? He had said an hour ago that he wished to finish his office of the day and would be with them in a minute.

"I wonder," said Michael, "what's the matter?"

"Knock, Michael," said the prefect, "and tell him we're going unless he wants us for something else."

Michael knocked; there was no answer. He knocked again. A silence had come upon all.

"For heaven's sake," cried the prefect, "go in, Michael."

Michael entered. Father Carney was seated at his desk, his face buried in his breviary. Michael ran out.

"I—I—believe he's dead."

Thereupon a very nervous young woman, the treasurer of the Sodality, gave an ear-piercing shriek.

"What's the matter?" cried Father Carney, jumping up and issuing from his office. He looked with no little surprise upon the most frightened crowd of young women he had ever seen in the office of St. Xavier School.

"We thought you were dead," said Michael.

"Not; not quite; but I feel fishy."

"You *look* fishy," said Michael.

"Father, I'd advise you to go right straight to bed," said the prefect.

"Yes; do, Father," came the chorus.

"I did intend to say a few words to you before I go. In fact, I think I'd better say them now. I may not be around to-morrow. Sit down for one minute, girls."

They all obeyed. Most of them were as pale as their Director.

"I have made out a list of those who want to trade with us," said Father Carney. "Michael will keep it. We trade coupon for coupon. But we'll have far more coupons in

stock than any of those we trade with, and so we can afford to help along three or four specially selected girls by giving them our extra coupons. If we concentrate in that way upon two or three, I think we can see them through toward winning their piano."

"That's a splendid idea," said Lilly.

"First of all, there's a Miss Tennison, a domestic."

"Oh, I know her," cried Miss Sarah Brandon, the head regulator. "She's a convert and a girl with some musical education. She is going to marry a young electrician, Thomas Donovan, a little after Christmas. She met him here at one of our euchres. I introduced them to each other myself."

"Capital!" said the Director. "She's getting ready for housekeeping, and wants a piano. Shall we all work for her?"

"Yes, Father," cried all.

"And then there's a saleslady in Avondale who's been a good member of our Sodality, Grace Raeburn. She was one of the first to see me."

"Why, she's going to get married, too," cried Kate Rowan, the secretary. "She's marrying Joe Linden, one of the best Catholic young men in our parish. I don't know whether they first met at our euchres, or not, but at any rate that's where they cultivated each other's acquaintance."

"I say," interpolated Michael, "is this a matrimonial bureau?"

"A bond market, Michael. Then there's a

third girl, and I think a lot of her. Her name is Mary Corbett."

"Good!" cried a dozen voices.

"She's worked in a factory all her life. She's taken care of a sick father for years. He was buried hardly more than a year ago. The girl has wonderful talent for music. Shall we work for her?"

"Yes—yes—yes!!!"

"Very good. Michael and Lilly will specialize on getting coupons marked *Domestic, Saleslady,* and *Factory*. We help two girls to a happy wedding and one to many a pleasant hour. Well, good night; I'm all in."

"Father," said Michael, "shall I help you over to your room?"

The Director drew himself up. For the moment he looked like his normal self as he said

"I think, Michael, that with proper circumspection I'll be able to toddle home all by myself."

And this was the last word that the assembled group heard from the lips of Father Carney for many a day. He was taken to the Good Samaritan Hospital that very night, and before he had fairly entered the elevator of that venerable institution, word flew round the parish that he was to be operated on for appendicitis.

## CHAPTER V

### *Father Donnell Entertains an Angel Unawares, and Looks Vainly for More Heavenly Visitants*

"GOOD morning, Michael."

"Good morning, Father Donnell; how's Father Carney?"

"Who informed you of his illness?"

"Why, it's all over the parish. Last night, just after they took him to the hospital, people said he was going to be operated on for appendicitis. This morning, they were saying he had cancer; and here at the school they're saying now that he's got a bad case of typhoid fever?"

"Isn't rumor a curious thing?" apostrophized the old Father.

"And they say that you were sent for at 7:15 o'clock this morning and gave him the last sacraments. Is that true, Father?"

The old man drew himself up, folded his hands before him, composed his face, cleared his throat; then he said:

"No, Michael; it is not true."

"Oh!" ejaculated Michael.

"At a quarter past seven this morning I was taking my breakfast. But when I got to my room, there was word awaiting me that Father Carney was anxious to have me visit

him at once. Accordingly, I went to the Good Samaritan Hospital without delay."

"And is he very bad?" cried Michael.

Father Donnell paused, composed himself, hemmed, then gazed meditatively at Michael for full five seconds.

"He might be much worse."

"But what's the matter with him?" pursued Michael.

"We had a long conference," continued Father Donnell, in even tones and talking to some invisible audience, "the upshot of which was that I was to take charge of the school until his convalescence."

"Until what?" asked Michael.

"Until his convalescence."

"But how is he, Father?"

"He is much better this morning. Last night, the surgeons and the doctors were of opinion that it would be necessary to operate on him; but this morning the danger of such an eventuality would seem to have passed. He is resting comfortably, and doing as well as could be expected under the circumstances."

"Good!" cried Michael. "Do you think he'll be with us to-morrow?"

Father Donnell made a long pause—as though he were examining his conscience.

"No, Michael," he announced after clearing his throat, "nor the day after, nor, in fact, this week. It's a question as to when he will be able to resume the customary round of his duties."

"And when may I go to see him? May I go at noon to-day?"

"No, Michael; certainly not," answered Father Donnell, without his customary pause. "The physician in charge prescribes absolute quiet until further orders. And now, Michael, if any visitors come, seat them in the order of their coming, and tell them I am visiting the classes to acquaint the children with the nature of Father Carney's indisposition, and to secure their innocent prayers for the recovery of their beloved Director.

"Before you go, Father, there's a woman in Father Carney's office waiting to see the priest in charge."

As Father Donnell shut himself in, Michael dashed for the unabridged dictionary and began a study of English words. His studies engaged him—broken by the visits of boys, girls, men and women bearing coupons —three quarters of an hour; and came to an end with the reappearance of Father Donnell and his visitor, a middle-aged woman of a florid complexion. As she made her way to the door, she continued to thank the good Father profusely.

"Michael," said the priest, "have you ever studied character?"

"I only went as far as the seventh grade, Father."

"Well, I'd like to understand the mental processes of that woman who just went out. She told me the history of her deceased husband; the number, ages, and avocations of her three children; the several families of St. Xavier Parish—with names and street addresses—who are personal friends of hers.

Then she went on to give me a circumstantial account of her own life from babyhood up to and including the funeral of her husband, with the number of carriages. Then she began a minute description of the floral offerings."

"Gee!" said Michael. "Did you fall for all that?"

"No, Michael; I interrupted her before she quite got through describing a floral horseshoe of white roses, and asked her what she wanted."

"Why didn't you ask her that in the beginning?"

"We learn by experience. It would seem she has a chance to be a waitress at Martin's Hotel, and she needs thirty-five cents to buy an apron. So I gave her the money. After all, it was a charity."

"She won't buy any apron," said Michael. "You'll find her over in the 'ladies' sitting-room at Martin's now, I'll bet. Everybody around here knows her."

"Indeed," said the Father. "But why should she have given me the history of her life? It's very curious. Well, I'll go now——"

"Excuse me, but is Father Carney in?" asked a refined woman standing without at the open door.

"Father Carney, Madam," answered his representative, "is quite indisposed, and is confined to a room in the Good Samaritan. I myself am taking his place."

"Very well, Father; if you could spare me a moment, I'd be glad to see you."

"This way, Madam," indicated Father

Donnell, preceding her into the private office. "And now, Madam," he resumed, as he seated himself, "take that chair, sit down, and state your business without prelude."

The lady flushed and bit her lip; she raised her eyes and gazed into the face of the priest. The gentle countenance, the benevolent eyes, the whole air of the man were at variance with his words.

"I beg your pardon, Father; but it will be impossible for me to state my business without first asking a few questions."

"Madam, pray proceed."

"I understand, Father, that this is a free school."

Father Donnell looked into space, cleared his throat, and fell into a brief meditation.

"Yes, Madam, it is."

"I am told also, that the expenses of maintaining it are about seven thousand five hundred dollars a year."

"Excuse me, Madam." Then, arising and opening the door,——

"Michael," he went on, "about how much does it cost a year to meet the running expenses of St. Xavier School?"

"Father Carney says from $7,500 to $8,000."

"Madam," said the Father, after returning and slowly seating himself, "it costs from $7,500 to $8,000."

"And I have been told that this money is raised through the voluntary contributions of the parishioners and friends of the school."

"You are correctly informed, Madam. The people are very generous. Proceed!"

"In the parish calendar I have read that by paying a certain lump sum, one may become a perpetual member."

"I—I—think so."

"And how much is required for a perpetual membership?"

"Excuse me, Madam." Again the venerable priest went to the door. "Michael, how much must one pay for a perpetual membership?"

"One hundred dollars, Father."

"One hundred dollars, Madam," answered Father Donnell, still keeping his place at the door.

"Two Masses," continued Michael, unasked, "are said each week for all members."

"Two Masses, Madam," echoed the priest, "are offered each week for all members."

"And," continued the lady, "may one enter for membership one's deceased relatives?"

"Michael, may one enter one's deceased relatives for perpetual membership?" continued Father Donnell, still holding the knob of the door.

"Sure; the Masses are then said for them."

"Yes, Madam," said the temporary Director, resuming his chair. "The Masses are then offered for them."

"Very well," said the lady opening her hand-bag, and taking out an envelope. "In this, Father, you will find two hundred dollars and the names of my father and mother,

both dead, to be entered for perpetual membership."

Father Donnell, looking extremely dazed, accepted the envelope, holding it almost at arm's length as though it were loaded. Then, having already risen, he straightened himself, adjusted his spectacles, cleared his throat, and was about to speak. Words failed him, and he went through the preliminary process once more.

"Madam, in the name of the school, I thank you from my heart. I—I—Excuse me, one moment." And Father Donnell, with an alacrity of step quite astonishing in one of his years, hastened to Michael's desk.

"Michael," he whispered, "one never knows when one is entertaining angels unawares. I thought a moment ago that possibly the lady within wanted some money to buy an apron, and I was quite short with her. She's given me two hundred dollars for membership for her deceased father and mother. I have thanked her. Now, what am I to do next?"

"Write her out a receipt."

"Oh, that's it!"

"Here's a receipt book, Father."

"One never knows what is coming next in this school," remarked Father Donnell, a few minutes later, having, in his courtly and normal way, bowed the lady out.

As if to justify this observation, a man of forty, with bloodshot eyes and staggering gait, entered and looked about solemnly.

"I used to go to this school myself," he observed.

"Yes?" said Father Donnell, politely, still thinking of entertaining angels unawares.

"I made my First Communion here," continued the shabby man of the bloodshot eye.

"Perhaps you'd like to be confirmed," suggested Michael.

"I want to speak to a priest," the man announced.

"I am a priest, sir," said the Father, "and what may you want with a priest?"

"I want to have a chat about old times."

"My good sir," said Father Donnell, taking the man by the arm, walking him into the vestibule, and gently but firmly starting him down the steps, "what you really want is the pledge for life. Go over to the pastor's residence and get it. Good-bye."

And thus freed of visitors, the old gentleman started on his round of the classes—an occupation which absorbed his time till half-past eleven o'clock.

Michael, looking exceedingly flustered, met him as he was coming down the steps on the boys' side of the school.

"Father, there's a mob of women waiting to see you."

"Michael, I'm quite wearied. My voice is gone; I have visited every classroom, and have got all the children to praying for Father Carney's speedy recovery. I'm worn out, and don't feel able to face any more people this morning. In fact, I want to go home and lie down. What do all those people want of me? Why didn't you get rid of them yourself?"

"I did get out eight or nine. Those that are left want to see you about the contest."

"Can't you attend to that yourself?"

"I don't know, Father; they all want to see you."

"A contest," resumed the temporary Director, "is really not school-work at all. After all, Michael, what is a mere piano compared with eternity?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Michael.

"There's but one thing necessary; and all the rest is leather and prunella."

"Yes, Father," assented Michael, making a mental note of the word prunella. "You ought to see the way the coupons are coming in. We've just got stacks of 'em on my desk, and Miss Lilly McCabe, the prefect of the Y. L. S., is sure we're going to win. She's in the office now, and helps a lot. And, Father, here's an important message I took down. See, I've got it written out."

Father Donnell took the paper, and read aloud:

"Doctor Lindsay, the school physician, arrived at 10.00 o'clock. He says that there's danger of an outbreak of smallpox in the city, and that the Health Department has ordered that every child in the various schools should be vaccinated. Those girls who have no family physician may call at Doctor Lindsay's office on Broadway at 4.00 o'clock this afternoon, and get vaccinated free. And the boys without a family doctor may call at his office at 7:30 o'clock to-night. Doctor Lindsay wants the school director to do his best to persuade

the children to get vaccinated. If they do not, they will be excluded from school."

"By saying children who have no family doctors he means those who can't afford to pay," explained Michael.

Father Donnell cleared his throat, meditated, and cleared his throat again.

"Am I to understand, Michael, that I am to go through all the classrooms once more, and make this announcement?"

"I guess so, Father."

"I put my foot down here," said the Father, with unlooked-for fervor. "It is doubtful whether I shall return this afternoon. I really must rest. In any event, I will not make a second pilgrimage through the classes. Can't it be done any other way?"

"Perhaps," suggested Michael, "I could get the head Brother to take it up with the boys, and the head Sister with the girls."

"A very good suggestion, my boy. Do so."

"All right, Father."

They had, in the course of this conversation, arrived at the office. Father Donnell opened the door, and put in his head.

"Ladies," he announced to the assembled multitude, "I understand that you have come to see me about the contest. I am really too fatigued to listen to you; and, moreover, I am going to have nothing to do with the contest. The office boy, Master Michael Desmond, and the prefect of the Young Ladies' Sodality, Miss Lilly McCabe, will, I am sure, handle your cases much better than I could. Good morning." Saying which and forgetting

his hat, the old Father made for the front exit with an alacrity, in view of his fatigue, quite surprising.

In the ensuing five minutes, the noon-day throng on Sycamore Street, between Fifth and Seventh, were regaled with the sight of a venerable priest, bareheaded and visibly excited, making his way to the pastor's house, explaining severally to five excited women, all of them middle-aged and aggressive, that he did not care to buy any coupons at ten cents a hundred, that he understood the contest was to be a popularity contest, that he could not promise to espouse the cause of any special lady or ladies, that he was surprised to be accused of being unfair, that he was not and never had been Director of the Young Ladies' Sodality, that it was a cruel mistake to take him for Father Carney, and that he would advise all of them—this he said in front of St. Xavier Church—to pay a visit to the church, and prepare themselves for confession.

## CHAPTER VI

*In Which is Given a True and Unvarnished Account of Policeman Jones and His Experiences in Attempting to Disperse an Army of Small Boys*

THE assembled workers, as they clipped and sorted coupons on that memorable Wednesday night, were discussing with no little animation Father Carney's illness, and different phases of the popularity contest.

"I don't want to do any 'bossing,'" said Master Michael, during a lull, "but we've got to get all our coupons for the Y. L. S. contest sorted and stamped and counted to-night. We got a letter from the Contest Editor of the 'Starboard' this afternoon asking us as a special favor to send in what coupons we have early to-morrow, so that they can make an announcement of the votes on Friday—just to get the thing going."

"Hadn't we better hold back?" enquired Kate Newman, the treasurer.

"We might; but if we come out ahead on the first announcement, people will see we're in it for fair. Those Sunflowers are laughing at us. I guess they'll be laughing on the other side of their mouth next Friday."

"They're working like Trojans," observed Miss McCabe. "My brother tells me that they've a committee of three in every precinct

of the down-town wards, whose business it is to go from saloon to saloon from 6:30 in the evening to 7:30, and collect all the coupons. The Sunflowers have already opened an office in the Traction Building, on Fifth and Walnut."

"Yes," assented Alice Primm, the first assistant, "and they're buying coupons at ten cents a hundred."

"What!" cried Michael. "You call that a popularity contest! Oh, pshaw!"

"If it comes to that," said another officer, "why can't we buy too?"

"Nix on the buy," said Michael. "Father Donnell before he left this morning told me we were to spend no money. He said that Father Carney insisted on our winning fairly or not at all. 'If we want to buy a piano, we'll do it straight,' said Father Carney, 'but we'll not pay for a piano and pretend we got it because we were so popular.' "

"I'm afraid," said Katie Rowan, "that there'll be little of a popularity contest this time. They begin with trading—all of them —domestics, stenographers, bookkeepers, and what not—but when the contest comes close to the last day, the girl with the fattest purse is going to get the piano."

"Not in three cases, I'll bet," said Michael.

"That's right, Michael; Miss Tennison is going to win and our two Sodalists," said the prefect. "We're getting in by trading hundreds and hundreds of coupons for them. I think we'll see them through sure; but I don't feel so certain about our own piano."

"You needn't give up before you're whipped," said the indignant Michael.

During this conversation, Eva, seated at a small desk near the door, was attending to a line of callers. She was conducting the exchange. Since the opening of the office at 7 o'clock, she had, by way of trading, received in round numbers 700 coupons for the Y. L. S.,—not to mention 300 more given by workers for the school—500 domestic, 400 saleslady, and 650 factory coupons.

"Look at the way that little Eva works," commented the prefect to Sarah Brandon, the head regulator. "She is quick as a flash. She counts coupons the way I've seen bank cashiers count money. Did you ever see such fingers? There's magic in them."

"Yes," returned the head regulator, "and notice the precision and order of her desk. She can put her hand on any sort of coupon almost automatically. The girl's a wonder."

There were loud sounds of laughter in the vestibule. Jerry was passing the time of day with two young men.

"Listen to Jerry," said Michael. "I wonder what he's laughing about?"

There came a silence in the office.

"Sure, come right in. Of course, they're all women in there. But they're all members of the Young Ladies' Sodality; and every one of 'em is as good as gold."

"Huh!" growled Michael, "where do I come in?"

"Come on both of you; I'll introduce you myself," continued Jerry. "With me you'll be

safe—Ladies," continued Jerry, holding the two men with either arm, and almost forcing them into the office, "here are two very bashful young men. This one, on my right, is Thomas Donovan. He's going to marry Miss Tennison. And this other one is Joe Linden; and he's going to marry Grace Raeburn."

The young gentlemen, all smiles and blushes, bowed.

"I am speaking for Joe Linden as well as myself," said Tom Donovan, "when I say that we are most grateful to the Young Ladies' Sodality for their kindly interest in the two young ladies upon whom we have—er—upon whom we are—"

"Mashed," suggested Michael.

"That was the end of the speech. For the next five minutes, the conversation was slight, but the giggles incessant. The two young men, rich in coupons, kept the quick and alert Eva very busy.

The giggles were still continuing, when the telephone bell rang. Michael, closing himself in, took up the receiver. He came out presently in a high state of excitement.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, "all the fat is in the fire! Mr. Fester, who runs the drug store on Fifth and Broadway has just called up. He says there's a near riot on Broadway between his place and Doctor Lindsay's. There's a thousand boys there, and they're yelling and shouting and pushing. He says that if Father Carney doesn't do something to stop things, the police will send for the patrol wagons."

"Will you stand by me?" cried Jerry to the two young men. "Sure I knew you would. Well, come on then; it's only a square and a half. We'll go there, and see that there's no fighting or fussing."

On the word, the three peacemakers were gone.

Promptly at a quarter to seven on the same evening, Master James Connell, better known by his intimates as Brother Fat, a name bestowed upon him as a delicate compliment to his extreme slenderness of person, issued forth from his Pioneer Street house with an air of unusual alacrity. Brother Fat, like most of his school companions, was not up to the subtleties of the English tongue. He understood clearly that there was danger of a smallpox epidemic. In common with most of the schoolboys, he had got it into his head that unless he were vaccinated, he would be sure to fall a victim to the dread scourge. He had a great dread of losing his youthful beauty. Therefore, he was determined to be vaccinated out of hand. He had *not* understood, nor for that matter, with the exception of five or six lads, had the other boys understood, that those who had family doctors should go to them. Doctor Lindsay, it was clear, was willing and ready to vaccinate, free of charge, all comers, provided only that they were in attendance at St. Xavier School. Like most boys, he loved to get something for nothing.

Brother Fat was eminently gregarious. He had no intention of going alone. Accordingly, he traversed the length of Pioneer Street—it

ran for not more than three city blocks—and stopping before the houses blessed with St. Xavier boys, yelled and shrieked until his summons was answered. Each boy as he aligned himself with Brother Fat made it his duty, as it was his joy, to assist in these lively calls and demonstrations. Very presently the salutations, owing to the growing number of Brother Fat's following, were somewhat more horrible than the midnight serenade of a company of cats. In fact, it became unnecessary to carry out the plan of visiting each home; the boys came trooping out from all quarters; and within ten minutes, Brother Fat proceeded with his noisy band, about fifty strong, up Pioneer Street to Broadway. These brave youths went forward eagerly to be vaccinated. Looking at them, one would think they were going for an ice-cream treat.

On reaching Broadway, they crossed the street and turned, each of the band removing his hat as he passed the Italian church, to the south. Doctor Lindsay's office was but a few doors below. To the dismay of Brother Fat and his following, a line of at least seventy boys, stretching from the doctor's office almost down to Fifth Street, greeted their eyes.

"Holy smoke!" cried the leader. "I thought we'd be here first of all."

After some preliminary salutes and maneuvers for position, the Pioneer Street contingent drew up in line beginning with the doctor's office, and stretching north toward Sixth Street. While this arrangement, personally attended to by Brother Fat himself, was being

perfected the Ellen Street boys, yelling and singing, came up on a run; next, with but a few minutes' interval, followed Baum Street, then Lock and Eggleston Avenue, combined. By this time, the space about the doctor's office for ten or twelve yards in either direction, had become a seething mass of boyhood, and when the Sixth Street hill boys, and the large contingent from across the canal joined the crowd, they pushed, they pulled, they shouted, they screamed, they wrestled, they swayed hither and thither. The doctor, meanwhile, was taking them in six at a time, and, assisted by two nurses, was operating on their arms with feverish haste. He urged each lad as he sent him off to go home at once. In justice to all parties and to subsequent events, it must be here stated that, so far as is known, not a single boy profited by his advice.

In spite of the tugging and pulling, all had, so far, gone as merry as a free picnic. But trouble was near at hand. Officer Stephen Jones, hearing the noise from Fourth and Sycamore, was fast approaching.

Officer Stephen Jones was the most unpopular policeman on the force. He had begun his career as guardian of the city's peace on the hilltops in a fashionable district where children were a negligible quantity. As there was practically nothing to do there, Jones had succeeded in doing it. Then there came in, on the preceding January first, a change in the city's administration; and the usual shift of policemen, coming with such a change, gradually took place. It was thought by the new city

mayor and his aides that the policemen of the second district were all creatures of the councilman, Andrew Monahan, "king of the eighth ward," a member of the party now out of power. As a matter of fact, Mr. Monahan, in previous years, had had much to do with the choosing of the policemen in his district; and, a leader and reader of men, he had chosen wisely. The second district was as finely appointed with its three lieutenants, its two sergeants, and its regular patrolmen as any in the United States. The councilman, in his goodness of heart, had sometimes helped men to the force who were unworthy; but he himself was the first to detect their unworthiness, and he himself was the first to see that they were suspended or dismissed.

This side of the matter, however, was unknown to the incoming administration; so two of the three lieutenants were sent to the hilltops, and most of the efficient patrolmen were dispersed to those places where they could have little or nothing to do with the dreaded King of the Eighth.

This shift brought Patrolman Jones from Clifton to the down-town district. Jones had no sympathy for children, which, in other words, signifies that he did not understand them. He took an apparently ghoulish glee in breaking up their little games on lot and street; he fussed with their parents; he stopped more than one child returning package-laden from the grocery to question them as though they were suspicious characters. All this was enough to win him a richly deserved unpopu-

larity. But the climax came, when, early in October, he arrested Brother Fat and two of his companions for smoking cigarettes on the street. In vain did Brother Fat explain that the cigarettes were "cubebs." Jones was deaf to all pleadings. On reaching the station, Lieutenant Gildea released the boys at once (Lieutenant Gildea was slated for removal, but the axe had not yet fallen) and, after their prompt and speedy disappearance, thus addressed Jones:

"Jones, in my experience on the force, I've met all kinds of asses; but you seem to combine the whole lot in yourself and to have also two or three other kinds of asses in your make-up that I never thought were possible in any human being."

"But they were sm——"

"Stuff! If they were smoking tobacco cigarettes you'd have handed them over to their mothers for a spanking, if you'd had any sense. But to arrest kids of eleven!"

In vain did Councilman Monahan—lover of children—protest against the presence of Jones in his district. The administration knew one thing in Jones' favor: he hated the councilman, and so he was retained. It was Patrolman Jones, then, who, hearing from afar the shrieks and cries from this mob of good-natured, jolly, thoughtless boys, came hastening around the corner of Fifth and Broadway.

Brother Fat, always alert, was the first to see him.

"Cheese it! Cheese it!" he yelled.

And then a thousand throats took up the cry:

"Cheese it! Cheese it!"

A thousand throats, I say. This is probably an understatement. At the north corner of Broadway and Pioneer Street, where the power building now stands, there was at this time a tenement occupied entirely by negroes. All the windows were filled with dusky forms, and, in front, the men folks of the house were grouped along with apparently any number of their friends from the neighboring district, then known as "Bucktown." On the opposite side of Pioneer, nearly all the little girls of that well-known street, accompanied, many of them, by one or both parents, were showing a lively interest in the antics of the boys. There had been services in the Italian church, and the worshipers were now grouped upon its steps and the sidewalk in front. Between Pioneer and Sixth, just across from the doctor's office, was a very ill-lighted house, with a small front yard. Fifty or sixty hoodlums were in occupancy of this coign of vantage. They were looking for trouble. Such was the position of the various outsiders. As for the boys, they formed a whirling, seething, squirming mass from the doorstep of the doctor's office—spreading out like a wedge almost entirely across the street. It has been estimated that there were fully six hundred youths in this wedge.

"Cheese it! Cheese it!" came the chorus.

The officer, already furious, gazed about. On either side the wedge, two or three cars

were waiting, the motormen vainly clanging their gongs for right of way. Nobody, apparently, heard the gongs. All interest was focused on the solitary police officer.

"It's Jones! It's Jones!" The whisper spread from mouth to mouth. Everybody within a few seconds knew it was Jones: everybody in the neigborhood had heard of Jones. His name was a byword and a hissing.

"Get out of the road, you gutter-snipes," cried Jones, addressing the wedge. "Clear out, can't you; and let these cars pass."

The officer emphasized these orders by slapping a very small boy with very long curls. He was on the outskirts of the wedge, and really had nothing to do with the case.

Then arose from every side, from Pioneer Street north and south, from Broadway down to Fifth and up to Sixth, groans, cat-calls, hisses.

Jones threw himself bodily against the wedge. The futility of this was apparent to all.

"Yah! Yah!" yelled the hoodlums in the dark yard, and Jones started for them.

"Three days in a circus," piped Brother Fat, in tones so ringing that everybody caught each separate syllable: and Jones, white with fury, started for him.

Brother Fat, a life-long student of the police force, knew among other things that Jones had once essayed the part of clown in Robinson's circus, and had lasted just three days to a fraction.

Before delivering this announcement, Brother Fat had dexterously disentangled himself

from the wedge, taking the highest step of the Italian church. It is hardly necessary to state that long before the irate officer made for this position, Brother Fat was in quite a different place. He had discreetly crossed the street and retired behind the willing forms of the black brethren, with many of whom, it must be confessed, he was on terms of familiarity.

It was at this stage of the proceedings—a stage when, through the stupidity of Officer Jones, the disorderly crowd was fast crystallizing into a mob—that Jerry and his two able-bodied friends came at a dead run around the corner of Fifth and Broadway. Jerry seized the situation at once.

"Quick, boys," he said, addressing the outer end of the wedge. "Spread out—spread out and move in so as to give the cars a chance to pass. Stand up for St. Xavier's."

These last words proved to be an inspiration.

"Rah for St. Xavier's," cried a clear-voiced youth.

And then, while the wedge spread and closed in, leaving room for the cars to pass, every voice apparently broke out with:

"Sarsaparilla, soda water, ginger
ale, and pop,
St. Xavier School is always on
the top."

Over and over again they shrilled these cabalistic words, while the cars passed on, the passengers thereof, showing by the waving of

handkerchiefs and other gestures, their complete enjoyment of the whole situation.

The mob-spirit was fast disappearing. There was shoving and pushing and jamming enough in all reason—but good-nature had returned.

A moment's quiet gave Officer Jones—who had spent the last few minutes in shoving and pushing little boys desultorily—another opportunity to put his foot in it.

Mounting a bread-box in front of Siess' grocery, he bawled out:

"You boys! I command you in the name of the law to disperse!"

There was a moment's quiet while the mob-spirit was again invading the assembled crowd.

Suddenly there boomed out from the negro section a raucous voice:

"Sunflower! Sunflower!"

A rather corpulent white man with a very red face, holding in one hand a small package, was standing between two grinning companions. All three looked as if they had been imbibing freely. Nor did their looks belie the facts. They were the collectors for the Sunflowers, and, just finished their round of saloons, had come thus untimely upon the scene.

Not pausing for breath, the corpulent man, who, as it happened, was just in front of Brother Fat, went on:

"St. Xavier, see this?" he yelled, shaking the package. "One thousand coupons for the Sunflowers. St. Xavier School is rotten!"

An audible tremor went through the crowd, as the leaves of the forest shiver before an

oncoming storm. Then suddenly arose shrieks, hisses, whistlings, and with the noise the wedge dissolved, reformed and moved like some new form of cyclone toward the daunted three. Long before this, Jerry and his companions had gained the spot whence had come the awful insult.

"I'd give a hundred dollars," hissed Jerry, "if I could only knock his block off."

The corpulent man, with his two companions, was now thoroughly frightened.

"Get out o' my way," he yelled, pushing into the street, intent, it would seem, on boarding a car just passing north. To get it, he would have to run. Three little girls happened to be in his path; with a sweep of both hands he sent them sprawling. This was too much for Jerry.

"Oh, you will, will you?" he bawled; and forth shot Jerry's fists. The man was down before the girls had risen. And then—

It is difficult to say what happened next.

There were four officers now on the scene besides Jones, and they were busy holding the mob in four different quarters. As for Officer Jones, he was beating his way to the scene of the fracas. The wedge, meantime, perceived his intention, and very thoughtfully put themselves in his path, while Jerry, forgetful of law, order, police, and the mission of peace on which he had come, was helping the unhappy collector of Sunflower coupons up Broadway with precisely three well-directed and hearty kicks.

Brother Fat was beside the janitor. He grew inspired.

"Bully for you, Jimmy White," he howled. "Hand him another. Put out his lights. Hurrah for Jimmy White."

The inspiration reached the mob.

"Jimmy White! Jimmy White!" they yelled.

With a supreme effort, Officer Jones, his uniform badly torn, elbowed his way through the wedge. Looking about in vain for Jimmy White, he found himself confronting Lieutenant Gildea.

"Where's that Jimmy White?" he gasped.

The lieutenant was facing the wedge, smiling serenely, and making little gestures with his hand. With each gesture the wedge was visibly melting away.

"You supreme ass!" the lieutenant said, his eyes still fixed on the wedge, his hands still going out in gesture, the smile—intended for the wedge alone—still on his face; "You've nearly started a riot. If there's anybody to be arrested, it ought to be yourself. Go and get Jimmy White. Chase yourself up Broadway as fast as you can, and don't stop till you get to Twelfth. And if you show yourself around here again to-night till these boys are gone—" the lieutenant stopped smiling, turned his hand toward Jones in a threatening gesture, and eyeing him straight, went on—"by the Lord that made us, I'll arrest you myself for disturbing the peace, if I lose my position for it."

Lest the reader be scandalized, it may be necessary to state that Lieutenant Gildea had

no intention of taking the name of God in vain. It was a solemn moment; it was a dangerous moment, and the lieutenant used the language which, he felt assured, would best reach the intelligence of Officer Jones. And it did reach him. He was on his way for Broadway and Twelfth before Lieutenant Gildea's gesture was quite finished. He spent, it may be added, the next three days in a vain search for Jimmy White, and then disappeared, by removal, from the second district. His permanent dismissal from the force was but a matter of a few months.

It would be very inaccurate to say that the trouble was now over. Far from it. It is true that a large number of the negroes—every police character in the group—disappeared at sight of Lieutenant Gildea. He knew them all so intimately, that they were not at all inclined to improve his acquaintance: but the hoodlums attracted to the scene were now taking a hand, and it was clear, that there was still a chance of further trouble.

The lieutenant looked about. He was still, to all appearances, cool; he was still smiling. Suddenly his face lighted up. At the same moment, a sudden hush, a prolonged sh—— went through the crowd. Father Donnell, perfectly cool and tranquil, was standing on the top step of the Italian church. In a moment, and while the Father, according to his custom, was clearing his throat, the lieutenant was beside him.

"Glad you're come, Father. One word from

you, and I'll do the rest. Get your boys together, and I'll manage the outsiders."

"Let all the St. Xavier boys step this way," commanded the priest.

There was a swirl, a human whirlpool for a moment; and presently Father Donnell was gazing upon the boys' department of St. Xavier's. Some of them were rubbing gingerly their vaccinated arms.

"Let the eighth grade come forward. That's it; stand in line.—Now the seventh. Good—Now the sixth."

In five minutes the boys, looking very sweet and subdued, were in perfect order.

Lieutenant Gildea, in the meantime, filled a patrol wagon with a company consisting of two negroes and five hoodlums, for all of whom he had long been looking; Jerry, alias Jimmy White, was explaining to his scandalized wife how he had bruised his knuckles, and the corpulent gentleman, now quite sober, was, in the privacy of his own apartment, plastering his face and wondering what he had done with his thousand coupons.

## CHAPTER VII

### *James Connell Goes to Confession, Thereby Saving Two Detectives Considerable Trouble*

ON Friday morning, two days after the little affair on Broadway, Master Michael Desmond and Miss Lilly McCabe were hard at it counting, cutting, and sorting coupons. They had been doing a land-office business; and in the doing had become fast friends. Michael showed his growing esteem for the prefect of the Young Ladies' Sodality by various references to her height. He was curious to know whether, when she stood erect, she found any difference in the thermometer—whether her head wasn't much cooler than her feet; whether, when at table with her family, it was ever necessary, with her long reach, to have any dish passed to her; whether she generally had to stoop when entering ordinary doorways. To all of which Miss McCabe deigned no reply.

"I say, Miss Six-Foot-Three," he began after a term of counting coupons, "did you see the article about Father Donnell in yesterday's 'Starboard'?"

"No; what was it about?"

"It said he was a hero."

"A hero?"

"Yes; the headlines read:

*Father Donnell of St. Xavier's a Hero*
*Puts One Over on the Police*
*Stops a Near-Riot With a Few Words*

"And then the reporter tells how two thousand boys started rough house while they were waiting to get vaccinated."

"Two thousand boys!" echoed the prefect.

"That's the way the paper figured it. And it said how Officer Jones came along, and was powerless to do anything. Then he sent for help, and four more policemen came along, and they couldn't do anything. Then Lieutenant Gildea came along, and when the niggers saw him—the Bucktown crowd—they all disappeared and went somewhere else to examine their consciences."

"I wonder why?" exclaimed the prefect.

"You needn't wonder," said Michael with enthusiasm. "Lieutenant Gildea knows every tough nigger in the district. When anything goes wrong amongst 'em, he just sails in, generally all by himself, and yanks out the fellows who have caused the trouble. They never show any fight to *him.*"

"And why not?"

"I guess they've seen him in action too often. There's not much of him. I guess that in size he's one of the smallest men on the force; but what there is of him is all there. He's not afraid of anything, and those niggers know it."

"I think I've seen him," said the prefect.

"He looks small for a policeman, and has a cheerful face—always ready to smile—and a small, grizzled mustache."

"That's him! He lives on Pioneer, and all the kids swear by him. Even the niggers—the good ones—like him."

"Well, Michael, what else did the paper say?"

"Oh, it told how three drunken men came along and one of 'em a big fat fellow, name not known, began sayin' things against the school, and a fellow about twenty-four named Jim White——"

"Did they have that name in?" cried Miss McCabe.

"They sure did. Brother Fat started that. Anyhow, they said that Jim White was probably a professional prizefighter."

Lilly McCabe's laugh rang out loud and clear.

"Well, this Jim White broke through the crowd, and let fly with one fist after the other at the big man, and down he went like a ninepin. Then this here Jim White helped him up and turned him round and sent him flying. Jim White disappeared somehow or other before Jones could get him. Jones is still looking for him."

"And is that all?" asked Lilly.

"Oh, no! The paper says that everybody started in for a free-for-all fight, and that boulders were flying."

"That is a lie," cried the indignant prefect.

"I know it is; but that's what the paper said. And suddenly in the midst of it all Father

Donnell appeared. As soon as they saw him, everything stopped. Father Donnell raised his hand, and all got down on their knees to receive his blessing."

"Oh!" cried Lilly.

"There's a good, big, whopping lie for you," commented Michael. "But that's what the paper said. It also said that the fat man lost his coupons. I guess that's true. I was there myself when Father Donnell came—you know I went over for him and brought him down. He stood there watching those boys till every last one of 'em was vaccinated and went home. From the time he came, and Lieutenant Gildea loaded up the patrol wagon, it was like a Sunday-school meeting when there's an ice-cream treat."

"I suppose everybody on Broadway and Pioneer Street—not to speak of the other streets near by—was there to see the fun."

"Yes," assented Michael, "everybody in the neighborhood for four blocks round knew what was going on, except one."

"Who was that?"

"Doctor Lindsay. He was so busy vaccinating the bunch, and keeping his eyes on the kids in his office—he had 'em in six at a time —that he didn't know there was any trouble going on till it was all over."

"Trouble? Who said trouble?" exclaimed Jerry, entering the open doorway. "It's myself that's in trouble, if it comes to that!"

"You needn't look so sad, Jimmy White," said Michael. "That fat fellow's laying for

you. He says he can lick two like you when he's sober."

"Oh, bother that fat fellow. If he's laying for me, it's to be ready to run when he sees me coming. But I'm afraid I'll be arrested. The Sunflower people say that the fellow named Jimmy White stole over one thousand of their coupons. Sure, I never gave his coupons a thought. And they've got detectives out."

"They have?"

"Yes; there were two down in the boiler room to see me a minute ago."

"Great Scott!" cried Michael.

"Yes; and they wanted to know if I knew of anybody in the parish of the name of Jimmy White. I told them I did not. Then they asked me whether I was over at the row on Wednesday; and I said I was."

"You did!" cried Michael.

"Of course I did. Did you want me to lie?"

"Oh, go on," growled Michael, with an air of resignation.

"They asked me next if I saw the fellow named White when he started in to knock the fat man out, and I said I did not."

"There's a lie for you," said Michael.

"Wirra!" shouted Jerry then several times. "Did you think I was carrying a looking-glass with me and looking at meself, between the licks and the kicks. I said that I'd seen White's arms and legs, but that I got no chance to see his face."

"The absolute truth," laughed Miss McCabe.

"And," continued Jerry, the look of anxiety

on his face giving way to a smile which developed into a tremendous laugh, "I told them that if I ever met Jimmy White face to face I'd bundle him off to the station meself."

"Well, what are you afraid of?" asked the prefect. "Those detectives don't suspect you."

"But they will find out. Every child in the school knows that meself and Jim White are the same. And Lieutenant Gildea has known it all along."

"I'll bet the lieutenant knows, if it comes to that, who took the coupons too. He took in everything," commented Michael. In this Michael was wrong, as he found out a few minutes later, when no less a person than Brother Fat presented himself at the office.

Brother Fat, aged twelve, was a very slim, wiry youth, with auburn hair, kindly eyes, a good-natured mouth, a freckled face, and the most expressive features of any boy in attendance at St. Xavier School. Looking at him on occasion, one could see his expression go with lightning-like rapidity

"From grave to gay, from lively
to severe."

In proper circumstances, Father Carney had seen that face of his run through the gamut of emotions. Brother Fat knew every dog between his home and Sycamore Street, all of the children, and nearly every negro. His acquaintance was large, and, to tell the truth, indiscriminate. He had a smile and a word for every man, woman, and child he met. His

friends in the fire department were legion; he was on speaking terms with the chief of police; Councilman Monahan was a trusted friend.

On the occasion of his present appearance, Brother Fat's face was filled with woe.

"Michael," he said in a stage whisper, "come out here a minute. I want to speak to you private."

Michael promptly arose, and followed the mysterious Brother Fat into the vestibule.

"Say, Mike," he said in sepulchral tones, "I went to confession yesterday."

"No doubt you needed it," said the unsympathetic Michael. "Why, I reckon every boy in the school went yesterday afternoon; they always do before the First Friday. I heard some of the Sodality ladies say last night that the boys all took about twice as long as usual."

"The priest I went to," continued Brother Fat in deep sadness of tone and face, "kept me in for over ten minutes. My knees are sore yet."

"Well, what about it?"

"Sh——!" Brother Fat's face grew darkly tragic. He looked him up, and he looked him down, and he looked him all around. Then from the inside pocket of his little coat he drew a package.

"There they are," he muttered, holding the package in his hand.

"What?"

"The coupons that guy had when Jerry landed on his jaw."

"Great Scott!" cried Michael.

"Sh——! Not so loud. When the guy hit

the ground, I was just behind him; his hand with the coupons as he came down nearly got me in the nose, and I just reached out and grabbed the coupons and beat it for home."

"You did?"

"Yes," continued the sad-eyed Brother Fat, "I was going to give 'em in a hundred or so at a time; but the confessor said nix."

"Couldn't you give 'em to the poor?" suggested Michael. "There's a lot of poor boys in this school."

"The confessor said those coupons belonged to the Sunflowers and they should be returned to them."

"I guess he's right," said Michael, taking the package of coupons in his hand, and looking at them sorrowfully. "So you'd better run down to their office in the Traction Building, and hand 'em over."

"Who? Me?" cried Brother Fat, his face alive with indignation, and his lip curling with scorn at the suggestion. "Not on your life! I'd like to see myself going down there and explaining how it all happened."

"Don't talk so loud!" warned Michael. "Look—look—" he continued. "See those two men coming in?"

When Michael turned his gaze from the two men, he was amazed to discover no trace of Brother Fat. That versatile youth recognized at a glance Detectives Sweeney and Hill. There were few plain clothes men whom he did not know by sight and by name.

Slipping the suspicious packet into his pocket, Michael gazed with no little consternation at

the approaching visitors. His heart beat fast. He felt like a pickpocket caught in the act.

"Good morning," said Detective Hill. "Is the principal of the school in?"

"Yes," said Michael with almost too much eagerness. "You'll find him in his office. Step just this way." And Michael escorted the two sleuths into the presence of Father Donnell. Also, he thoughtfully left the door open. Michael's curiosity, in the circumstances, was justifiable.

The two men began by questioning the simple Father about the vaccination events. His answers were direct, to the point. At length, Detective Hill said:

"The fact is, Father, over one thousand coupons belonging to the Sunflowers were lost, or, as is more probable, stolen. There's a fellow named Jim White who, it is thought, knows all about those coupons. Do you know Jim White?"

"No," Father Donnell made answer. "There's no person of my acquaintance answering to that name."

"Well, then; answer me this," continued Detective Hill earnestly. "Do you happen to know who it was that attacked, knocked down, and afterward kicked Tom Roden?—that's the name of the fat fellow who lost the coupons. Do you know who it was?"

Father Donnell rose, cleared his throat, folded his hands, looked meditatively at the ceiling, then, permitting his eyes to rest on Detective Hill, he said:

"Excuse me, but aren't you a Catholic?"

"I'm proud to say, Father, I'm a convert."

"Now, how long was it since your last confession?"

Then Michael had five minutes of sheer glee, while Father Donnell, having thus turned the table, put the two detectives through a spiritual third degree. When both of them had solemnly promised to go to confession on the following Saturday, they arose and showed some eagerness to get away. Taking no notice of their dispositions, Father Donnell gravely went on to give them a sermon, practical, to the point, and, we may believe, efficacious.

The two were glad to go.

"I say," observed Michael casually, as they came into his office, "are you looking for those coupons that the fat guy lost?"

"Yes!" cried both in a breath.

"Here they are—1,021. Count 'em."

"Where did you get them?" said Hill.

"When the fat guy went down for the count," said Michael, "the coupons were in his hand; and somebody just took 'em off. They might have been lost, you know."

"Precisely," said Sweeney, with tremendous earnestness. "How thoughtful. They might have been lost."

"So he brought 'em to me this morning to have 'em sent to the Sunflowers."

"Was it a St. Xavier schoolboy?" asked Hill.

"If I answer that will you stop your questions?"

"Yes."

"Well, it was a St. Xavier boy."

"And do you mean to tell me," said Sweeney, "that any St. Xavier schoolboy with a thousand coupons in his possession would pass 'em over to the Sunflowers instead of to his own school?"

"That's just what he's done," said Michael. "In this school our boys are all just like that."

"Yesterday," resumed Hill after a slight pause, "was Thursday, the eve of First Friday. Did the boys go to confession?"

"Every mother's son of 'em," said Michael.

"Oh!" cried Sweeney. "That explains it."

"I understand," said Michael, demurely, "that you two are thinking of going yourselves."

"Next Saturday," came the voice of Father Donnell from the inner office. Father Donnell was supposed to be deaf. "Next Saturday at four o'clock."

"We ought to go after this," said Hill, holding up the package. "And, by the way, my boy, you may tell Jerry not to worry about Jim White. Now that we've got the coupons we're not bothering about Jim White any more."

"And what has that got to do with Jerry?" asked Michael.

The detectives looked at each other and laughed.

"Ask Jerry what skinned his knuckles," said Hill. "You may tell him that the Sunflower officers say that their fat friend got exactly what was coming to him. He's discharged. The Sunflowers are a pretty decent set."

"Oh, I guess they're all right," admitted Michael.

"Yes; and one word of advice," continued Sweeney. "Drop this contest: you haven't the ghost of a show."

"I should say not," cried Michael indignantly.

"I say, Miss McCabe," continued the office boy, when the two detectives had gone their ways, "it takes Father Donnell to handle these people. Those two went in to cross-examine Father Donnell. He showed 'em that two could play at that game. Yesterday a woman came in with blood in her eye. She laid into Father Donnell just fierce. She was talking about the way the Brothers treated her boy Tommie. Tommie, you know, has been up in the Juvenile Court three times in the last two years; once for breaking into a candy store, once for riding off on a bicycle that belonged to some other fellow, and once for playing truant for two months straight. All the same, that mother of his told Father Donnell that there wasn't a more angelic and more abused boy in the city of Cincinnati than her Tommie. Then she laid into the Brothers; then she took an inning out of Father Carney—by the way, he's sitting up to-day—and then she got down to Father Donnell.

"And didn't Father Donnell have anything to say?" inquired Lilly.

"He just let her run on till she got out of breath, and then he said, 'Madam, do you ever say your beads?"

"You don't say!" exclaimed Lilly.

"She got dumb at once. Then Father Donnell went at her again. 'Madam,' he says,

have you got a pair of beads?' She said she hadn't; and Father Donnell took out a new pair, blessed 'em, gave 'em to her, and told her to say 'em every day. And the next thing you know, out she came with her mouth open and her head down and the beads in her hand. She was perfectly dumb. She came for a fight, and she got a pair of beads. It took all the wind out of her sails— Halloo, here comes Miss Tennison. Good morning, Miss Tennison."

"Good morning, Michael. Good morning, Miss McCabe; you are just the two I wanted to see."

"And how are the coupons coming in?" asked Lilly as she shook hands cordially with the young "domestic."

"Very well! And how are they coming in for me down here?"

"Only fair," answered Lilly. "You see the Sodality girls know Miss Corbett and Miss Raeburn because both are members—good members, too. So all the girls are working very hard for them. In fact, I feel quite sure that both will win. But, you see, not all are working for you."

"It's only natural," said Miss Tennison, "and I'm very grateful for what you are doing. If it weren't for your Sodality, I would withdraw right now. They're making a tremendous fight against me."

"Indeed!"

"Yes: if you don't mind, I'll tell you all about it. Suppose we sit down; I've my scissors with me, and we can work while we talk."

"I see, you're practical," said Lilly. The

three drew their chairs around Michael's desk, and with various interruptions in the shape of mothers and book agents to see Father Donnell, and of men, women, and children coming in with coupons, Miss Tennison told her tale.

"To begin with," she said, "up to one year and a half ago I was a stenographer in Dayton."

"And now you're a domestic," said Lilly, tentatively.

"I left school for a stenographer's position, and held it till I met"—here her voice grew soft—"Tom."

"Oh, yes—of course," said Michael, with subtle irony. "Then everything—stenography included—was off."

"Not in the way you think, young man. Tom and I became engaged three months after our acquaintance."

"How sweet!" apostrophized the office boy.

"Michael!" remonstrated Lilly, glaring at him, "if you don't keep a civil tongue in your head I'll drop you out the window."

"Well, it *was* sweet!" growled Michael.

"Now as soon as I became engaged, I began to take stock of myself. It was an easy matter. I knew a little music—I had taken the piano for five years—a little algebra, a little English, a little bookkeeping. But I did not know how to cook, sew, or keep house."

"Oh, I begin to see!" said the prefect.

"My parents were poor, and there are five or six children younger than I. Well, I waited long enough to get my sister next to me in age in my position, and I then came straight

to Cincinnati. I had made up my mind that I would not marry Tom till I knew how to cook and sew and keep house the right way. You see, I happened to know several girls up our way who married without being prepared for it. People wonder why their young husbands are always hanging around saloons, or dining out at clubs. I know why. It's one of those things that every woman ought to know."

"Miss Tennison," cried Lilly impulsively, "you're a girl after my heart. So you became a domestic to learn the ropes."

"I came to Cincinnati for that purpose; but I was unlucky at the start. I didn't know any one, and I went to an employment bureau. They got five dollars from me under false pretenses. It seems, too, they were swindling and imposing on any number of country girls. I didn't mind the five dollars so *very* much; but I was angry when I learned from other poor girls how they had been treated. So I got a lawyer, a friend of the family, to attend to them. They're doing business yet: but they are honest now: they have to be. But the woman who runs it has not forgotten me. Her name is Mrs. Jane Rockefeller. She's a widow."

"Any relation to Standard Oil?" queried Michael.

"I believe not. In fact, I doubt whether that's her real name at all. Well, she's put up a rival candidate, Miss Florence Bigbie: and she's got over a dozen employment agencies, and a woman's home and I don't know what all, working for Miss Bigbie. She was good

enough to say that she was going to defeat me, if it were the last thing she ever did."

"Oh, she is, is she?" exclaimed Lilly. "Well, of all the things I ever heard! The idea! That's what I call spite."

"They're working tooth and nail. The Rockefeller woman, I believe, without saying anything openly, is doing all she can to prejudice others against me."

"Well: we can work it the other way," said Lilly. "We can do all we can to make others think well of you. And we'll do it. Michael, what are you fidgetting about?"

"I'm wondering if they've made out the count yet. You know we brought down eight thousand coupons yesterday for ourselves. In to-day's 'Starboard' they're going to announce the standing of all in the thousand dollar piano contest."

"Suppose you call up the contest editor," suggested the prefect.

Michael, with pencil and paper, closed himself in the booth. He came out, a few minutes later, holding the paper, and trying to look unconcerned.

"Listen," he said. Then he went on to read: "The one thousand dollar piano contest, begun two days before the other contests, is on with a swing. Votes are thick as leaves in Vallombrosa. The contest promises to be the most exciting ever held in this city. It is impossible at this stage of the game even to hazard a guess as to the winner. All have a fighting chance. Owing to a private understanding with the contestants, we are able to

make a preliminary announcement of the votes. Hereafter, the announcements of the voting will be made on Wednesdays only.

| *Names of Popularity Contestants* | *Votes* |
|---|---|
| Don't Worry Club | 572 |
| White Mice | 1947 |
| Eastern Stars | 4500 |
| Woman's Club | 4700 |
| Ancient Order of Sunflowers | 8200 |
| Young Ladies' Sodality | 9460 |

"First blood for us!" cried Lilly.
"Whoop!" shouted Michael.

## CHAPTER VIII

*The Sunflowers Begin to Show Their Strength. Michael Visits Father Carney and Meets Colonel Bridwell*

FOR Michael, the days of the contest went on the wings of the air. Old time was flying with a vengence. With each day the sense of responsibility grew; for Miss McCabe, the prefect, not being able to be on hand, entrusted the duty of settling little points to him. As for Father Donnell, he made it appear to everybody that he had nothing to do with the contest; that he really was quite at sea in a matter so novel to him; that he was nevertheless heart and soul for St. Xavier, and that he made a memento each morning at Mass for the school's success.

Notwithstanding his declared stand, the kind old priest did take an occasional hand in the contest. Struck by the thorough and unintermitting work of Eva, he presented that rather astonished Miss of thirteen with a doll. Also, in his quiet way he went occasionally from class to class, and having first reminded the children of their religious duty, always went on to inquire about their work in the contest. Having made the round of the classes, a performance which he undertook at least twice a week, Father Donnell invariably left the school and was seen no more for that day.

The Sixth Avenue Hill children, always to the fore in initiative, put their heads together one day with a view of getting a much larger number of coupons than could be secured by ordinary devices. Before the meeting was over a vaudeville show was arranged for, admission being ten coupons. It was the work of a few hours to engage the services of Alice Morrow and other stars.

The show was put on in an open lot, well screened for the occasion, and netted fifteen hundred coupons. Pioneer Street took up the idea. Miss Morrow and other artists were secured and an attendance of 120 at ten coupons each, encouraged Baum Street, Gilbert Avenue, and Woodward Street to make the same experiment. Eva and Catherine continued their house to house canvass with such results that others in various parts of the parish took it up also.

On Monday, December 5, Master Michael, Brother Fat, and Paul Carpenter, each carrying a box marked, "5,000 Popularity Coupons for the $1,000 Piano," marched bravely over to the "Starboard" office.

"You may put us down for 15,000 coupons," said Michael to the editor of the contest. The editor was seated on a small chair in a small office. The door of his office opened into a second room, in which were piled up a number of packages. Brother Fat, without waiting for an invitation, promptly made his way into the room, and cast a quick and comprehensive eye over the various wrappers.

"Fifteen thousand, you say?" exclaimed the

editor. "Fine work. You St. Xavier people know how to get the coupons. Keep on, boys, and the piano is yours."

"For Heaven's sake, Brother Fat," cried Michael as they got outside, "what makes you wear such a long face?"

"I was looking around," said Brother Fat, darkly.

"Well, what of it?"

"And I saw five packages of coupons from the Sunflowers and they were all as big as ours."

"You did!" exclaimed Michael, turning white.

"Yes, I did. I'm afraid they've brought in 25,000 coupons against our 15,000 coupons."

Upon the three came a dead silence, unbroken for fully five minutes. Michael slept very little that night. He turned and tossed and cudgelled his brain, to explain the situation. Just the same, he was up at five, and serving Mass at six. During these days of stress Michael went to communion every morning.

On Wednesday his worst fears were realized. The following was the vote from Wednesday, November 30 to Monday, December 5:

| | |
|---|---|
| Don't Worry Club | 1155 |
| White Mice | 2316 |
| Eastern Stars | 7500 |
| Woman's Club | 6200 |
| Sunflowers | 23600 |
| Young Ladies' Sodality | 16870 |

When Michael read this, he threw the paper on the floor, bit his lips, clenched his

hands, and took two or three turns about the office.

"Say, Father Donnell," he cried, picking up the paper and handing it to the temporary Director of the School, engaged just then in looking over the reports of the students, "please look at this."

Father Donnell readjusted his glasses and slowly read the account of the contest.

"Well, Michael," he said calmly.

"But, Father, the Sunflowers have brought in almost 9,000 more coupons than we have in the last five days."

"Michael, my boy," said Father Donnell, "remember the words of Doctor Johnson: 'It's better to deserve success than to succeed.' You have deserved to succeed. Be content with that. I see," continued the good old priest, "that the Irish are making great headway toward obtaining home rule."

Here Father Donnell paused to clear his throat. He was about to develop his theme when Michael broke in with, "Is Father Carney well enough to be seen yet?"

"He is very much improved, Michael, but the doctor does not care to have him receive many visitors until his period of convalescence is well under way."

"Do you think I could see him for a few moments, Father?" asked Michael, eagerly.

"Perhaps, you might. In fact, if my memory serves me rightly, he expressed yesterday afternoon when I visited him, some sort of a desire to see you."

"He did! Say, may I run out for half an

hour or so now? I want to see him the worst way."

"Yes, Michael, you may."

The office boy was off at the word and, running most of the way, was at the entrance of the Good Samaritan Hospital within five minutes. The gentle Sister at the door was rather loath to admit Michael.

"Father Carney," she said, "has a visitor now. He had three this morning. I've turned away almost a dozen since noon. The doctor wants us to be very particular."

"But I am his office boy."

"Oh," said the Sister, betraying signs of lively interest, "you're that office boy, are you? I've heard of you. It's your sister, Josephine, who comes here every day to collect coupons."

"That's her all right," said Michael, "but can't I see Father Carney for just a few minutes?"

"Certainly; but don't talk loud. He's quite nervous," and the Sister led the way to Father Carney's room.

"Hello, Michael, is that you?" came a feeble voice,—the ghost of Father Carney's—from an invalid chair.

"Why, Father Carney," cried the shocked Michael. He had some reason to be shocked. The person of Father Carney corresponded to his voice. The priest had grown thin and haggard.

"You needn't look so solemn, Michael. I'm not dead yet—Mr. Bridwell," continued the invalid, "I want you to meet my office boy."

Mr. Robert Bridwell, popularly addressed

as Colonel, arose with a smile and caught Michael's hand. He was a middle-aged man, just a little below medium height, faultlessly dressed, with close cropped white hair, a neatly trimmed, small, white mustache, and extremely bright, rather prominent blue eyes. His face was regular; in its expression could be detected quickness, a Celtic sense of humor, and great and unusual kindness.

"Why," said Mr. Bridwell, "Father Carney and I were just talking of you. If you hadn't come here, I'd have paid you a visit. The way Father Carney spoke of you, I thought you must be at least eighteen and here you are, a little kid of thirteen—"

"I'm fourteen," protested Michael.

"—In knickerbockers running a school office and a popularity contest."

"And how is the contest going?" put in Father Carney.

"Rotten!" said Michael. "I've done my best, Father, but we can't get along without you. If you were with us, we wouldn't be 9,000 votes behind those Sunflowers."

"You're wrong, Michael," said Father Carney, "it would be just the same."

"That's so," said the colonel. "You take this contest from any angle you please, and you're up against it. I know these Sunflowers, though I'm not a member of that Club, and I know they can't afford to lose. It was a mistake to go into the contest from the start. Your school won the popularity contest two or three years ago, hands down—but as for this one—it would be cheaper to buy a piano."

"Mr. Bridwell," said Father Carney, speaking with now and then a little catch of the breath, "was good enough to offer to collect five hundred dollars for me to buy coupons. But I really couldn't think of such a thing."

"You're right, Father Carney," said Mr. Bridwell. "I just wanted to show my good will."

"If I hadn't been sick the day you announced the contest to me, Michael, I'd have refused to enter. I knew from the way things were turning in the last contest we had that if another should be started, it would be a question not of who enjoyed the greatest popularity but of who was willing to spend the most money."

"Well, what shall we do, then?" asked Michael. "Is there no chance? And if not, shall we give up?"

"While there's life, there's hope," interjected Mr. Bridwell.

"On no account should we give up," said Father Carney. "Nobody knows how things may turn. And besides we are working for those two Sodality girls and Miss Tennison. If we drew out, they might lose all chance of winning a piano. If we hold together, we can see them through."

"That's so," assented Michael. "That Tennison girl is down often, and she always works. I like her. There's an employment agency trying to do her up, out of spite. She's over 1,000 votes behind Miss Florence Bigbie, the woman that employment agency is boosting."

"How do the votes stand?" asked Father Carney.

"Miss Bigbie has 7,452 and Miss Tennison 6,427. The other domestics aren't anywhere. There are five of them, but none is as high as 2,000."

"What coupons does Miss Tennison need?" asked the Colonel.

"Those marked *Domestic.*"

"Very good, I'll see that she gets at least a hundred a day," said Mr. Bridwell, taking out a note-book and making a memorandum.

"And how about our two Sodality girls?" continued Father Carney.

"Oh, they're away up. Each of 'em has over ten thousand votes, and each is 4,000 ahead of the ones nearest them."

"Yes," said Father Carney, "I see our way clear to putting the two Sodalists through; but I'm worried about Miss Tennison. The friends of Miss Bigbie are buying votes; paying ten cents a hundred."

"That's bad when it is so early in the game," observed Mr. Bridwell. "This popularity contest is going to turn into a pocket-book contest, I'm afraid."

"And, Michael," said Father Carney, "I want to thank you for your faithful work. You are doing ten times as much as I have any right to expect of you. Keep it up. I have seen Miss Lilly McCabe, and we have agreed that, taking everything into consideration, you are to have charge of the contest. You have grit enough. In a day or so, when I'm well enough to travel, I'm going to Cleveland to

make my annual retreat, so the whole thing will be in your hands."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Michael.

"And suppose, Michael," said Mr. Bridwell, "that you got into such a fix that you didn't know what step to take next. What would you do?"

Michael pondered for a moment.

"I'd pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament."

Mr. Bridwell was startled.

"Good!" he said, "and then?"

"Then, I'd talk it over with my mother."

"Good again! The boy," continued Mr. Bridwell, "who faces his troubles that way will never go far astray. Here, Michael," slipping him a silver dollar, "you buy yourself some ice-cream—and bring some home to your mother. Now bid Father Carney good-bye, and if ever you want me, just call up the Havlin."

## CHAPTER IX

### *A Sad Chapter, and Therefore Short. Michael, Becoming Desperate, Seeks Counsel*

ON Monday evening, December 12, Michael led another and a much larger procession to the contest office of the "Starboard." Brother Fat and Paul Carpenter were followed by three other boys—all carrying heavy packages. They were coming in with their returns, on this particular evening over 40,000 strong.

"I'll bet we've got the Sunflowers going to a fade-away," cried Brother Fat.

"We'll be ahead of them at least ten thousand," said Paul. "Don't you think so, Michael?"

"I wish I could," answered the office boy in sad tones. "But they're buying coupons right and left, and they've got a lot of good workers besides. Those fellows seem to believe in anything to win."

"Why, boys, you're doing splendid work," cried the editor, as the party claiming 42,314 votes put down their packages. "You stand a mighty good chance to win."

"Have the Sunflowers turned in yet?" asked Michael.

"Yes, they turned in about fifteen minutes ago."

"And how do they stand?"

"I don't exactly remember," said the contest editor evasively.

"Are they ahead of us?"

"Oh, you know we count them ourselves every Wednesday morning," answered the man, "so as to verify the claims. Then, besides, you know, a number of votes come in for you and the Sunflowers and the other contestants through the mail and by bearers."

"Oh, I see," said Michael, and then observing Brother Fat had successfully completed his inspection of the inner room, he added: "Well, good night, sir."

"Say," whispered Brother Fat as they took their way down the stairs, "we're in bad!"

"How?"

"Those Sunflowers have six packages in that room, and each one is marked 'ten thousand.' "

"What!" cried Michael, stopping and supporting himself against the balustrade. Michael looked sick. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his face.

"Yes, and there's a little one there marked 'five hundred' and it's theirs too."

Michael put his hands deep into his pockets, and said nothing.

"Hello, boys," said a hale, cheerful man of about fifty, as the procession came out on Walnut Street. "Are you from St. Xavier's?"

"Yes," said Brother Fat.

"Well, let me give you a word of advice. Drop this contest. You haven't the ghost of a show. The Sunflowers are going to get that piano, if they have to pay twice its

value. They've spent a lot already, and they've got fifteen hundred dollars more on hand right now. And if they need it, they know where they can reach out for five hundred more."

"Thank you," said Brother Fat glumly.

The procession moved toward Main in silence. Before it reached Sycamore, two of the boys had a short but fierce fight.

"Go on, you fellows," said Michael. "Chase yourselves home."

He cuffed the two combatants impartially, advised the others "to soak their heads," and, when the boys had gone their way, repaired to St. Xavier Church.

Going up the middle aisle, he knelt at the communion railing before the beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart. For the first time in his brief life, Michael realized the meaning of the words, "Come to Me all ye that labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you."

Michael felt that he was in every deed heavily burthened. Father Carney had gone to Cleveland. Lilly McCabe had been called to the bedside of a sick married sister. The contest was going from bad to worse. Even the two Sodalists were being outdistanced by a combination. So Michael prayed with a new fervor and a great faith.

It was nearing nine o'clock; the church was almost empty. The minutes passed by; Michael remained on his knees. For the first time in his life he was, though he knew not, making mental prayer. Heart was speaking to heart. When we feel intensely, we speak easily.

Michael spoke to the Sacred Heart. But the burden of his long-drawn colloquy was, ever "What am I to do?"

The quarter rang out from the great clock in St. Xavier's steeple. Michael prayed on. He was very weary. He had risen that morning, after a night broken by dreams, at five o'clock. He had served Mass at six. After breakfast, the demands upon his attention had been so incessant that he had been content to snatch a hasty lunch and leave his supper barely touched. Michael's head went down upon his hands which were laid over the communion railing, his head went down and so remained. The half-hour struck, and the three-quarters,—Michael remained immovable. At five minutes to ten the night-watchman in his rounds observed a small boy wrapped in adoration before the Sacred Heart. He came over hastily and gazed for a moment in wonder on the motionless form of the office boy.

"Time to close the church," he whispered, catching the boy's arm. With a start, Michael threw up his head, rubbed his eyes, and looked around bewildered. All of a sudden, as he realized where he was, the unhappy memories of the day came back. He had sought light from the Sacred Heart, and the Sacred Heart had apparently refused the light; and yet that Heart, though it did not occur to Michael to think of such a thing, had "given His beloved sleep."

Michael genuflected, and then turned upon the Sacred Heart one last, long, lingering look of entreaty.

And then something happened.

There was a light—a perpetual light—burning before the statue. Enclosed in red glass, the flame threw a ruddy glow upon the face of the loving Christ. For a moment, Michael fancied that the light gathered itself up into a single splendid ray and shot straight into his face. Whether there was an illumination without or not, it is certain that within Michael's soul there came a light—a wondrous light. His soul was illumined. The unhappiness of a moment ago disappeared from his features, a great calm followed, then an expression of joy.

"Thank God!" muttered Michael fervently as he dashed down the church steps. "I see it all now. The way is clear."

## CHAPTER X

*Michael Carries a Secret in His Bosom.*
*Enter a Mysterious Woman.*
*The Plot Thickens*

ON Wednesday morning, Michael, wearing a flower, appeared at the office with an unusual air of briskness and cheer. There was confidence in his gait, in his words, in his gestures, in his smile.

"I understand," said Father Donnell, as Michael entered, "that the Sunflowers are now about 20,000 votes ahead of you."

"That's so," said Michael. "But what's 20,000 votes? Who's afraid? We're going to win that popularity contest."

"Don't be too sure, Michael."

"It's a cinch—at least, I think it is."

"The supreme confidence and energy of youth," observed Father Donnell, "have a nameless charm that is all their own."

"I have a great plan," Michael went on, his chin rising and his eyes sparkling. "I told my mother about it last night, and she says she thinks it is an inspiration. She told me not to tell anybody except the prefect of the Young Ladies' Sodality, and one or two people I can trust. She told me, too, that I ought to speak to you about it."

"If your mother approves of it, Michael, it must be all right. Your mother is distin-

guished for her excellent common sense. You just go ahead; popularity contests are entirely out of my line. It's a thing in which I have never had any experience. When I think of it all, I am completely lost. I see by the morning's papers that His Holiness is thinking of appointing nine new cardinals at the next consistory. Nine cardinals! What a tremendous bearing that will have on the future of the Church."

"Yes, Father," said Michael.

"In these unhappy days," continued Father Donnell, closing his eyes, folding his hands, and speaking with great tranquility, "the choice of the right men as princes of the Church is literally of paramount importance."

"Is it?" asked Michael.

"Yes, Michael: the Church has fallen upon evil times. I have always held"—Here Father Donnell paused to clear his throat.

"Say, Father, may I see Brother Fat? He's in his classroom; but it's important."

Father Donnell started. Why did that office boy always break in upon his soliloquies with such trivialities? He gazed with some severity upon the eager face of the boy. Evidently, he saw at once, Michael intended no offense.

"Yes, Michael, you may."

Two or three minutes later a man in the office of the wholesale druggist, just across from the school, observed with much interest a little scene in St. Xavier school yard directly in front of the main entrance. That evening he recounted it to his wife at the supper table.

"You've heard me speak of that office boy

at St. Xavier School, Eleanor," began he. "Well, I never saw him in such feather as he was this morning. He came popping out of the doorway, a little before nine, holding by the arm a little red-headed, spindle-shanked kid whose face was filled with eager wonder and expectation. The skinny boy's face was a study for angels and men. His eyes were popping out, his mouth was open. His whole expression said as clearly as could be, 'For heaven's sake. What's up? Tell me, or I'll bust.' "

"Then the office boy ran his hands through his hair, and began to talk. He spoke in whispers, and I fancy they must have been blood-curdling whispers; for Skinny's face grew very long. The whispering went on, and Skinny opened his mouth and kept it so. The whispers got lower, and Skinny put his ear within an inch of the office boy's mouth. Suddenly, his face became tragic, then indignant, then furious; he raised his head with a jerk, and bawled out, so that anybody could hear him.

" 'No, you don't: not in a thousand years!'

"Then that office boy got him by the buttonhole, and started in again. It was fun to watch Skinny's change of countenance. Anger was succeeded by amazement; great joy came next, then a grin, then a laugh; after which Skinny raised his hand and gave the office boy a slap on the back. They seemed to have come to some understanding. And then they walked up and down the yard, grinning and chuckling like a pair of conspirators with all the trumps on their side.

"I wonder what they were talking about?" said the wife.

"I'm sure I don't know. As like as not it's that piano contest. The office boy, so I'm told by people who know him, can't talk about anything else. But that's not all. They went in after a while—after shaking hands effusively. Before ten minutes had passed, a very tall young lady came toward the school entrance; but before she reached it, that office boy was out again. First, he told her something in a few words; and her jaw dropped, she threw up her hands, and said something that sounded to me like a wail of woe. The office boy came at her again, and spoke at length. He gesticulated very hard, pointing his index finger at her, shaking it tremendously. Then she began to look angry. After a while I thought she was going to shake him; but she didn't. On he kept, talking and gesticulating. It was just like the case of that skinny boy with the red hair. The anger went out of her face—suddenly she gasped—and the next thing you know she broke into one of the most beautiful smiles I've ever seen."

"Did you have a holiday down at your office all morning?" queried the wife tartly.

The husband looked pained.

"I thought," he observed, "you'd like to hear these little things."

And here we leave the happy couple to return to Michael and the contest.

Before ten o'clock, Michael, with a quickness and directness worthy of any cause, had arranged for vaudeville shows, one every night,

in various parts of the parish, up to and including Monday, December 19. He secured all the entertainers—the very best amateurs in the city. These entertainments, he figured, should average 2,000 coupons a night. At recess time, he got among the boys and by a few judicious remarks kindled their enthusiasm to a whiter glow. He was at pains to see personally every one that day who brought in coupons, and he sent nearly all of them away more determined than ever to work for the success of the Young Ladies' Sodality. Much water has passed under the bridges since that memorable Tuesday, and Michael since that time has performed many a hard day's work; but never since has he done so much in so little time. And yet the day was quiet, uneventful. It passed without incident.

Brother Fat, inelegantly dubbed "Skinny" by the literal and unimaginative man at the wholesale drug house, presented himself at the office that night, and informed the assembled young ladies that he was going to act as the office boy's assistant.

"We've got to whoop things up," he observed gravely, "and I'm the little whooper from Whooperville. Me and Michael had a little talk this morning and we're going to branch out."

"You ought to branch out," observed a sarcastic young lady, glancing severely at the slim form of the new assistant.

Brother Fat's countenance changed from marked friendliness to deep scorn and righteous indignation. He opened his mouth to say

something appropriate to the occasion, when Michael, from the inside office, called out—

"This way, quick, Brother Fat, we're losing time."

Glaring with no little disfavor at the offending young lady, Brother Fat edged his way into the inner office, going thither crabwise so as to keep his eye on the offender to the last. There was a secret colloquy within. Presently Michael came out.

"I say," he said, "don't you people get scared when you see the votes in to-morrow's 'Starboard.' You needn't worry at all; this is the week we are going to make our killing. To-day Miss McCabe and I circularized the Young Ladies' Sodality. We've asked 'em to put in their best licks between now and next Monday; and we figure on getting ten thousand to fifteen thousand extra coupons that way. This is to be the week of our big killing. Brother Fat and I are going to take care of all the Young Ladies' Sodality coupons in Father Carney's office. Just as fast as you've clipped 'em and sorted 'em, I'll take 'em in. So don't be afraid: we're going to win the popularity contest."

"Three cheers for that office boy," said one of the regulators; in reply to which demonstrations, given quite heartily, Michael filled his arms with Y. L. S. coupons and disappeared within.

The Sodality workers left at a quarter to ten, but the office boy and his assistant, both dark, taciturn, and mysterious, remained. They had further business to transact.

On Wednesday afternoon, the "Evening

Journal" announced the votes of their various candidates. Miss Florence Bigbie was credited with 8,000 votes and Miss Tennison with 11,580.

The "Starboard" also made known the progress of its various contestants. It was anything but cheering to the Xavier readers to learn that the two contestants from the Young Ladies' Sodality, Miss Raeburn and Miss Corbett, had fallen away in their lead, the former by 3,000 and the latter by 4,120 votes. Most of the contestants, it would appear, had retired, in each case in favor of one particular woman.

But gloom, indignation, and pain passed from home to home, when the startled occupants read the vote for the one thousand dollar piano contest. Many a young lady of the Sodality got no sleep that night.

Here is the sad record:

| | |
|---|---|
| Eastern Stars | 7424 |
| Don't Worry Club | 8121 |
| White Mice | 8243 |
| Woman's Club | 6319 |
| Y. L. S. of St. Xavier | 43644 |
| Sunflowers | 58538 |

An editorial note followed:

"The contest," it read, "would seem to be narrowing down to the Young Ladies' Sodality of St. Xavier Church and the Ancient Order of the Royal Sunflowers. On the face of it, the Sunflowers seem to have an excellent lead; but it would be a great mistake to think that the victory is assured. The Young Ladies'

Sodality are going to put in a very active week. Any one who knows the history of this organization need not be told what sudden and unlooked for resources they suddenly and unexpectedly develop. We have good reason to believe that on next Monday night the Y. L. S. will present such a load of coupons as will bring astonishment and dismay to the vigorous and hard fighting Sunflowers. The Y. L. S. are out this week for 100,000 coupons."

The first edition of the two evening papers announcing the standing of the various contestants was scarcely out, when a rather stout woman, heavily veiled, entered Michael's proper domain and asked to see Father Donnell. The boy showed her in: she remained, having first carefully closed the door herself, with Father Donnell for over half an hour.

"Michael," said the Father when the woman had left, "I'm thinking of encouraging the children to work harder in the contest."

"Good!" cried Michael.

"So, I'm going to get pictures, and medals, and some other things—and we'll give ten prizes in each class to the ten who bring in the most coupons between now and Monday afternoon."

"Fine!" cried Michael.

"And, Michael," continued Father Donnell, "I'm very anxious to help that nice young lady who is soon to be married."

"Miss Tennison?"

"Yes; Miss Tennison. I want you to trade in all the votes you can get for her, and bring

them in to me. There is no need, I am told, to worry about the two Sodalists in the contest. They are practically assured of victory. But Miss Tennison is not. Now, you get all to work, and I'm going to do a little something on my own account, too. We want twenty thousand votes for Miss Tennison by next Monday noon."

"Father, we'll get 'em," cried Michael. "We've got things going like a cyclone right now. We have loads of coupons of every kind, and we're called upon for trades more and more every day. You just leave it to me. Here's 1,900 coupons for Miss Tennison right now."

Brightening visibly Father Donnell took the coupons and shut himself within.

"I wonder what's happened?" queried Michael to himself: "Where did Father Donnell get all that information about the contest? Who told him that our two Sodality girls were sure of winning? That's not so: it looked that way a week ago, though. What put it into his head that we ought to concentrate on Miss Tennison? Gee! Isn't he waking himself up? and those prizes! Who put him on to that?"

Several days were to pass before Michael came to unriddle these mysteries.

## CHAPTER XI

*Eva Fagan Walks in Mystery, and Brother Fat Leaves His Supper Untasted. Josephine is Tempted to Pray for Life, and Yields*

THE remainder of the week was, as regards the office, the busiest in the history of St. Xavier School. Michael was growing perceptibly thinner. His days were busy, his nights broken. Little Josephine, his sister, had been taken ill on the very Monday evening when he paid his visit to the Sacred Heart. Her symptoms were serious, and the doctor was calling to see her twice daily. Every night, Michael insisted on relieving his mother from ten o'clock to one. He arose, nevertheless, in time to serve the six o'clock Mass.

The most frequent visitor to the office at this period was Brother Fat. Next to him in frequency was Eva. The three held many a whispered conference; after which Eva and Brother Fat went their ways mysteriously, only to return again and again. The parents of Brother Fat were much concerned about that young gentleman.

"James," said his mother, "you seem to be running with those niggers more than ever."

"No, I ain't," protested Brother Fat, poising his fork in the air. "I haven't any time to run with white people, let alone niggers."

"Why," pursued Mrs. Connell, "I saw you a little while ago talking with two of them at Pioneer and Broadway."

"Ah! I just said a few words," protested Brother Fat, looking hurt and unhappy.

"What will Father Carney say," his mother went on, "when he comes back and hears that you've fallen back into your old ways?"

"I haven't," protested the youth, gesticulating with knife and fork to the great discomfiture of his sister Jennie, who sat next to him. "Ma, there are some things that a fellow can't talk about."

A general laugh from the crowded table followed this announcement; the youth glared at each and all, but to no purpose. In fact, the chorus of laughter grew.

Looking at once hurt, indignant, and vastly mysterious, Brother Fat laid down his knife and fork and left the room.

"Why, the boy actually forgot to finish his supper," observed Mrs. Connell.

A dead silence fell upon the family circle.

It was at this period, too, that good Mrs. Milton of East Fifth Avenue had cause to worry. The openness, the candor, which had marked Eva's relations with her, since the child was placed in her hands, were no longer observable. Eva became taciturn, secretive, and, in answer to many of Mrs. Milton's questions, evasive. The child was preoccupied, ate little, slept poorly at night, and, worst of all, was apparently resuming acquaintanceship with the Random family and their friends.

"Eva," said Mrs. Milton on the last day of the week, "what has come over you?"

"Why, nothing, Auntie."

"But you don't eat, and you sleep poorly. Are you ill?"

"No, Auntie: I feel very well, but I'm so excited about the contest."

"The neighbors are saying that you are taking up with the Randoms and some of the people you used to go with."

"Well, Auntie, I am, in a way. You see, I'm getting them to help me in the contest. If you just wait a few days—till next week—you'll understand. There are some things I'm not allowed to talk about."

Michael's mother had no reason to worry about his extraordinary doings. She knew his secret and she kept it. But she had other anxieties. Little Josephine was fighting hard against a malady which, should it gain further foothold, spelled death. The mother was at her side night and day, leaving the child only when relieved for a few hours by Michael and Charles. Mrs. Desmond's face grew thin and haggard.

On Saturday evening she was sitting beside the tiny invalid, her mother's heart going out in a mother's prayer.

"Mama," said Josephine, "am I getting worse?"

"No, dear; I think not."

"Is there any danger, Mama?"

"No, Josephine; not yet."

"If I get worse, will there be danger?"

Mrs. Desmond essayed to answer, but her

lips so quivered that they could form no words.

"And to-morrow a week will be Christmas. Mama, aren't we going to have a Christmas tree? We haven't had one since papa died; and then I was only a baby."

Mrs. Desmond, muttering something about medicine, went into the kitchen; and there, all alone, she wept bitterly. For weeks she had looked forward to the coming Christmas. She had counted on having a Christmas tree and gifts for all the children. Only a few days ago she had seen her way clearly to all this; but Josephine's illness, coupled with the doctor's visits and expensive medicines, had shattered this pleasant dream. The extraordinary and unlooked-for expenses were beyond her income. Christmas day would find her penniless and in debt. Worst of all, that sacred day might dawn upon her with the frail little form of Josephine hushed and stilled by death. So, Mrs. Desmond wept. Commanding herself presently, she entered the sick-room, brave and smiling.

"Say, Mama, I want to go to communion," said Josephine.

"You shall go to-morrow, dear," said the mother. "Michael told Father Donnell about you yesterday, and he has promised to come."

"And, Mama, there's two things that's worrying me."

"You have no reason to worry, Josephine."

"I'm so sorry about sticking out my tongue the way I used to do at Michael and Charles behind their backs. I'm sorry and I'll never do it any more. And then, sometimes when

I've served Mass for Charles, I've laughed at him when he wasn't looking. That was deceitful. I'm sorry and I won't do it any more. Say, Mama, are we going to have a Christmas tree?"

"Hello, Ma; hello, Josephine!" cried Charles, coming in. "How are you feeling? Better? You're looking fine. Say, Ma, give me some bread and butter."

"How is the contest going?" asked Josephine, while Mrs. Desmond cut a slice from a loaf.

"Oh, it's going finely. Everybody says we're going to come in with 100,000 Monday night. You ought to see that office. Miss McCabe and Miss Tennison are there every morning, and there are others coming in the afternoon, and they're just up to their ears in work. Brother Fat and Michael are fixing up boxes to carry the coupons in—big wooden boxes. They say they're going to put one over on the Sunflowers. Each box is big enough to hold 10,000 coupons, and they have twelve boxes ready. They're over at the office working at 'em now." Here Master Charles paused and became silent; not that he had nothing more to say, but for the very good and sufficient reason that, being provided with the desired piece of bread and butter, he was now busy in a manner that called for his undivided attention.

Before Josephine could take up the interesting theme, there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," said Mrs. Desmond.

Three young ladies stepped in.

"I hope we're not intruding," said the fore-

most. "We are the sick committee of the Young Ladies' Sodality. I am Margaret Dalton, Mrs. Desmond. I suppose you know Miss Sallie McGuire and Miss Mattie Hennigan."

"You see," continued Miss Dalton, while the others were exchanging the usual greetings, "we regard Michael as an honorary member of our Sodality; he's working so hard for us. And when we heard that his sister Josephine was sick, we felt it almost a duty to come in and see her."

The three visitors did not enter empty-handed; they brought flowers and picture books. Very soon they put Josephine quite at her ease. Josephine wanted a doll for Christmas—any kind of a doll would do: she preferred a creature of blue eyes and golden hair. Of course, if the doll could close its eyes that would be so much the better. The finest doll she could imagine was one of those that could wink its eyes. She had seen one at the doll show. They called it a "Flirting Doll," she had no use for flirting girls, but flirting dolls were different. She had heard that they were expensive. Perhaps some day when Michael got rich she might be given a flirting doll.

"Josephine," said Miss Dalton of the kindly eyes and sympathetic face, "I'll tell you what I'll do. If you try hard to get well, I'll see that you get a flirting doll for Christmas."

Josephine took a deep breath.

"I just felt like I wanted to die a minute ago," she said slowly. "But now I've changed my mind. To-morrow I'm going to Holy Communion, and I'll ask the dear Child Jesus to

hurry up and cure me. Will it have blue eyes and fluffy hair like gold?"

"Certainly," said Miss Dalton.

Josephine fell back on her pillow and smiled.

"You feel better already, don't you?" said Miss Hennigan.

"I know I'm going to get well."

Another knock at the door. Mrs. Desmond rose and opened it to find a messenger with a large basket.

"Good day, mum. Is this Josephine Desmond's house? All right. I was told to leave this here."

"Why, exclaimed Mrs. Desmond, "this must be a mistake!" The card says from Robert Bridwell. He doesn't know Josephine. But her name is on it. Why, Josephine, look! There are fruits and candies in here fit for a king's table."

Josephine's eyes glistened as the mother took out oranges, pears, jellies, and dainty boxes; as for Charlie's, they threatened to pop out of his head.

"I—I can't eat 'em all," cried Josephine, with some regret, it must be confessed, in her tones.

"You needn't worry, Josephine," said Charles sweetly, "I'll help you myself."

They were still laughing at this kind and ingenuous offer when Michael entered. With the quick and unerring instinct of the small boy, he took in the basket and its contents first.

"Ah," he said, "that's from the Colonel. He's a friend of Father Carney's. I met him at the hospital, and yesterday he called at the

office, and he got real interested when I told him my sister was sick—Halloa—" he continued, deigning at length to notice the company. "Is this a meeting of the Y. L. S.?"

"We're making your sister an honorary member," volunteered Miss Sallie McGuire.

"You'll have a big crowd of such members, if you take in all who are working for you," said Michael.

"How are things going, Michael?" asked Miss Dalton.

"Fine! Could hardly be better. You just wait till Monday. Things are going to happen that day."

"I have been told," said Miss McGuire, "that the Sunflowers are going to go you one better."

"How's that?" asked Michael.

"You let it out that you intended coming in with 100,000 coupons Monday."

"It got into the paper, all right," said Michael. "What of it?"

"I think you made a mistake," said Miss McGuire.

"That's a fact, Michael," added Miss Hennigan.

"How so?"

"Because the Sunflowers say they will meet you every time. They'll meet you 100,000 votes next Monday; and go a little further, if they have to buy papers outright to make up the number."

"You just wait and see," answered Michael, nothing daunted. "Keep your eye on Monday. *Then* there's big things going to happen."

Michael expected much of Monday, but, as the sequel will show, there were a few surprises waiting him on that memorable day, which did not enter into his forecast at all.

## CHAPTER XII

*The Mysterious Woman Again. Miss Tennison Faints, and the Office Force is Shocked*

ON Monday morning, the stout woman, no longer heavily veiled, again presented herself, and asked to see Father Donnell.

"Step right in, ma'am," said the busy Michael. "And, ma'am," soliloquized the busy youth, as he slipped a rubber band over a package of coupons, "I'll know you again—smile and ingrown nose, and cock eye."

"Michael," said Father Donnell, a moment later, "have you any more 'Domestic' coupons?"

"Yes, Father: they've been coming in faster than any; I've about 5,000."

"You astound me! I have 28,000 inside. That makes 33,000. It is simply wonderful. And have you any wrapping paper?"

"I have some very nice tissue paper, Father. We got a lot of it along with some of the articles for the children's Christmas tree."

"Just the thing," said Father Donnell. "It will be most suitable. And have you any of those Red Cross Seal Christmas stamps?"

"All you want, Father."

"Let me have a dozen. Bring the paper and those coupons and the stamps inside. We'll attend to the rest."

Michael obeyed, and then began to wonder. Evidently Father Donnell was working on a plan of his own. What could it be? Michael gave it up, and devoted himself to the formidable stack of newspapers, and the various piles of coupons.

"Michael," said Father Donnell beaming with benevolence, as he and the strange woman bearing a large tissue-paper covered package issued together from the private office. "This lady is a great friend of Miss Tennison's."

"I've known her since she was knee high," said the woman, smiling unctuously.

"She wanted to get up a little surprise for Miss Tennison to-day," continued the priest. "It was a very kind thought. She asked me last week to get together all the coupons I could for her."

"Oh!" said Michael, "we'd have done that anyhow."

"Yes, but she said that if I made extra efforts, she would give me a present of twenty-five dollars to treat the children of the school who worked hardest."

"And I wish I had more to give," said the woman. "From now till Christmas, I'm going around to collect dolls and things for their Christmas tree."

"And you intend to turn those coupons over to Miss Tennison?" asked Michael of the woman.

"That's the surprise." The woman held up the large package, gay with Christmas stamps. "I'm going straight out to the place where she

works now, and give it to her, so she can bring it to the office to-night."

"That," said Father Donnell, "is the understanding upon which I gave the lady those coupons."

"Thank you ever so much, Father Donnell. You've made me very happy, and now I'm going to make Miss Tennison happy, too. Good-bye."

Michael opened the door for her, and followed her into the vestibule. Eva, carrying newspapers and coupons collected from the various classes of the girls, was just about to enter. Michael held up a warning hand. Eva paused.

"Eva," said Michael, as the woman passed through the doorway, "give me that stuff. You saw that woman? Follow her and find out what car she takes, and hurry back and let me know. I'll tell the Sister that you'll be back soon from an important message."

Then Michael hurried to the telephone and called up the residence in which Miss Tennison was employed.

It took him five minutes—five desperate, perspiring minutes—to get that young lady.

"Say," he said, "do you know a woman, middle-sized, rather stout, with a smile like an oil-well, thick, black hair, dark clothes, a nose that's rather big but looks as if somebody with a strong hand had flattened it back on her face? Do you know her? Oh, yes—I forgot, she's cock-eyed."

"Yes, Michael, I'm almost sure I do. Why do you ask?"

"Well, she's been here and got over 30,000 coupons for you. She left a moment ago, and said she was going straight out to your place to give 'em to you personally."

There came through the transmitter a strange, unintelligible sound.

"Is it all right?" cried Michael. "Say, do you hear?—What's the matter anyhow?—Are we cut off?—What's the matter with the telephone exchange anyway?" And Michael after further vain efforts to connect hung up the receiver.

He was wrong, as he afterward learned, in putting the blame upon the Telephone Company.

It was surprising, considering how busy he was, how Michael in the next fifteen minutes contrived to so touzle his hair. Even Father Donnell noticed his perturbation.

"Michael," he observed, "you seem to be uneasy. What's the trouble, my boy?"

"Father, somehow I don't trust that woman. I didn't like her eye. And that smile of hers would stop a clock."

"Oh, she seems to be quite a good woman, my boy. She's a very good Catholic; she showed me her beads; and she says she belongs to a Sodality on the hill."

At some length, Father Donnell went into his two interviews with the strange woman. The telephone bell brought him to a pause.

"St. Xavier School," announced Michael.

"I have a message for you from Miss Tennison," came a woman's voice. "She was taken ill a moment ago; but is now on her way down

in a hack. She was not very coherent in her speech since she fainted; but by the manner in which she spoke, I fancy something dreadful has happened."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Michael.

Then Michael repeated the conversation to Father Donnell.

"God bless us!" cried the good priest fervently. "Am I awake? That woman a fraud! It's incredible. I never heard of such a thing. I can't believe it. Michael, it strikes me that some of the people in this contest are wanting in simplicity. I never expected to meet such devious characters."

Without another word, Father Donnell left the office and hastened to the primary grade girls.

"Good morning, Father," cried fifty innocent voices.

"Good morning, children," returned Father Donnell. "You know how much Our Lord loves little children."

Father Donnell paused—not for a reply—but to clear his throat.

"Yes, Father," piped the children cheerfully.

"And He loves to hear the prayers of children."

"Yes, Father," was the unanimous agreement.

"Now, children, I very much fear I have made a blunder. But God can turn a blunder into a victory. Will you all pray that Our Lord will turn my blunder, if I have made one, into a victory?"

"Yes, Father."

"Come, then. Kneel down and let us say a Hail Mary together."

The little ones were on their knees on the instant, smiles merged sweetly into the composure of reverence, and little eyes were curtained, while little voices shrilled out in touching accents of faith the wondrous angelic salutation. It matters not that some of these little innocents were convinced that Father Donnell had lost his pocketbook and wanted it back, that others were filled with the belief that he had eaten something which disagreed with him, that still others brought home word that the holy priest was on the eve of a fight. Whatever these differences of interpretation on Father Donnell's announcement, all knew that he wanted something from Our Lord, all knew that he wanted it earnestly, and all prayed with that simple faith which is enough to move mountains.

Having exhorted them to say further prayers during the day, and having received a cheerful, "Yes, Father," the Director then went to the boy's classroom of the primary grade, and made a similar announcement—to such effect that eight different versions, none of them correct, promptly reached the homes of the sixty odd boys—and much comforted, returned to the office.

Eva and Michael were standing facing each other in tragic attitudes. Michael's face had gone green: he was braced against his desk, head down, beating with one foot upon the floor. Eva, breathless and flushed, was facing

him, her arms thrown out in a wide gesture of despair.

"Well, what is it?" cried Father Donnell. "It can't be very bad: I've got the little ones praying, and they'll be sure to keep off real harm."

"Tell him, Eva," said Michael, his head still down.

"I saw that package, Father."

"Where?"

"It was about two feet six inches square. It was wrapped in tissue paper and tied with strong, thin twine. On the top were twelve Christmas seals, three at each corner."

"That's it exactly," said Father Donnell. "The woman fixed it up herself. But where did you see it?"

"In the contest editor's office of the 'Journal'!"

"Why, she said she would bring the package direct to Miss Tennison!"

"I followed her from here all the way to the office. When she went in, I bought a paper and cut out the coupons, and came in after her. She was going out as I came in; and a man had the package at the desk and was writing on it.

"I went up to him, and handed my coupons, and that gave me a chance to read what he had written."

"Oh!" groaned Michael.

"What did he write?"

" 'Domestic: 33,000 for Miss Bigbie.' "

## CHAPTER XIII

### *A Chapter of Surprises; Eva is Taken Ill, and Brother Fat Makes a Startling Discovery*

WHEN, a moment later, Miss Tennison, pale and trembling, entered the office, her eyes fell upon a tableau, striking and dramatic. Michael, propped against his desk, was staring hard at the floor, while his right hand was violently stroking his hair. Eva, facing him, was holding both hands in a gesture intended to convey the exact size of the tissue-paper covered package; Father Donnell, standing back of the two, his eyes on the ceiling was moving his lips in prayer.

"I've lost the piano," said Miss Tennison abruptly, her lips quivering; she smothered a sob and sank into a chair.

"Who was that fat, ingrown-nosed, black-haired, oily-faced cock-eye?" asked Michael.

"She's Mrs. Jane Rockefeller, the woman that runs that employment bureau," answered Miss Tennison. "I knew she was capable of almost any sort of trick. But I never imagined she'd have the face to come to this office and capture my coupons."

"My dear young lady," said Father Donnell, "I realize that I have made an awful blunder. That woman completely deceived me.

She made me feel certain that she knew you intimately. She talked so nicely."

"She can do that to the queen's taste," interpolated Miss Tennison.

"Why, she said she lived in your parish on the hills."

"She doesn't," said Miss Tennison.

"And she claimed she was officer in the Ladies' Sodality out there."

"She's not even a Catholic. She has no religion, they tell me."

"Let me see," said Michael, who had been figuring. "Those Bigbie people were buying coupons at ten cents a hundred. At that rate, they would have paid thirty-three dollars for our 33,000 coupons. She got 'em for twenty-five dollars,—a saving of eight dollars. She paid us just a little over eight cents a hundred."

"I protest, Michael. The coupons were not sold. She simply stated that if I would get her twenty thousand coupons or so to present to Miss Tennison as a surprise, she would make me a donation for the school children, and it was on the understanding that she was to make them all over to Miss Tennison that I gave them to her."

"I'm a witness to that," said Michael.

"I know what I'll do," said Miss Tennison, "I'll telephone Tom at once. He knows all about that woman; and he'll go there and try to make her hand them back."

Eva and Michael glanced at each other ruefully. Father Donnell cleared his throat preparatory to a painful explanation. But Miss Tennison anticipated him.

"And if he can't persuade her, he'll try and frighten her. We'll get the same lawyer who brought her to time before to go after her."

"Miss Tennison," said Father Donnell, "It's too late."

"Too late?"

"Yes, the package is already in the contest editor's office and it is labelled 'Domestic, 33,000 for Miss Bigbie."

"It was written," said Eva, "with a blue lead pencil." Miss Tennison took out her handkerchief and wept.

Father Donnell looked at her helplessly for a moment, and pulling forth a huge bandanna, removed his spectacles and wiped his eyes.

" 'More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of,' " he quoted. "The innocent little children of this school, Miss Tennison, are praying that this terrible blunder may be righted. I had no idea that there were such deceitful people in the world."

"The question now is," said Michael, "what can we do? If we don't head this thing off, Miss Tennison hasn't a ghost of a show to get that piano."

"And I had so set my heart on it," cried the tear-faced young lady. "We were doing so well this week, and an hour ago, I felt almost certain we were going to win."

Michael, after his last remark, had gone into the telephone booth.

"Maybe," said Eva, "if you and Tom and the prefect of the Young Ladies' Sodality were to go down and see the contest editor and tell

of the mean trick, he might give them back." Then Eva proceeded to weep, too.

"You might do something that way," Miss Tennison," said Father Donnell, "and you can use my name and say that I am prepared to make an affidavit to the effect that I gave that woman those coupons on the express understanding that they were to be turned in for you."

"The contest editor of the 'Journal'" announced Michael, coming out of the telephone booth, "is off duty during the day. But he has to be at the office to-night to receive the vote, and he will be there sharp at six o'clock."

"That," observed Father Donnell, "will give us more time to pray."

"And," added Michael, "we are not going to give up, Miss Tennison. Since that woman walked off with those 33,000 coupons we got in at least 3,000 more, and to-day we are going to get dead loads of them."

"I think I ought to be back in class," observed Eva. "Father, will you please give me a note to my teacher? And, Miss Tennison, I want to ask you a great favor."

Miss Tennison wiped her eyes and looked inquiringly at the child.

"May I go with you to-night? You see, I was the one who saw the package just after it was delivered. It might help some if I came along."

"We shall be delighted to have you, Eva," said the young lady, who, even in the bitterness of sorrow, lost none of her sweetness.

Eva went her way in a mist of smiles and

tears. At noon she sent word to Mrs. Milton that "important business in regard to the contest" must account for her absence at lunch. She spent half an hour before the Blessed Sacrament. Like Michael, on an occasion already set down, she was praying for light. When she left the church, she went speedily, taking her way down town and eventually arriving at the school just in time for the afternoon classes.

It seemed to Michael that the clock was skipping the hours. Brother Fat and himself —bathed in perspiration, although the thermometer indicated several degrees below freezing point, had just succeeded in filling the twelfth box, labelled like its fellows, "10,000" —when a knock at the door caused them both to jump. They were working in the inside office, the door being kept jealously closed.

"What is it?" asked Michael, opening the door about three inches. He looked out upon a well-filled outer office.

"It is ten minutes to six, Michael," said the prefect. "And Miss Tennison, Mr. Donovan and Eva and myself are ready to start to the office of the 'Journal.'"

Although it was ever so early in the evening the room was filled with workers. All realized, that, as Michael had put it, there was to be a big killing that night. Many a Sodalist on this eventful evening went supperless to bed.

"Well, be sure to hurry back as fast as you can," said Michael entering the outer office, and carefully closing the door behind him.

"We need all the workers we can get. Hello, Eva; who fixed you up?"

At the door leading into the vestibule, Eva, vested in a robe that swept clear to her feet, her hair done up, stood like a sentinel. Thus arrayed and adorned, she looked like a young lady.

"I fixed myself," smiled Eva.

"Where did you get that grand opera cloak?" added Michael.

"I borrowed it," said Eva, simply.

"Well, good-bye, we're off," cried the prefect. Eva, still like a sentinel, waited till the three had passed, and then followed with much dignity.

This position, in the rear, she maintained all the way to the office of the "Journal." Mr. Donovan walked with Miss McCabe on one arm and Miss Tennison on the other; Eva followed them.

The office was a small room; a chair, a roll-top desk, a few magazines and papers, and, on one side a number of packages, most prominent among all, the large tissue-papered bundle with the Christmas stamps and the writing in blue pencil. The chair at this particular time was filled by a young man, with the first faint suspicion of a mustache. He was apparently very busy. The three entered briskly, followed by Eva, who, still acting the part of a sentinel, stopped beside the door, where erect and quiet, her hands covered by her "grand opera cloak" she stood statue-like during the proceedings.

"Well, what can I do for you?" asked the contest editor.

"My name is Donovan, and this young lady is Miss Tennison, who is in the 'Domestic' Contest."

"Glad to meet you all—especially you, Miss Tennison. You have certainly worked hard, and you are making the others hustle. I shouldn't be at all surprised if you were to win hands down."

"That's the way we all felt about it, until to-day," put in the prefect. "But unless you can help us by giving us fair play, I fear we shall have to give up."

"Indeed, if I can help you, I will be glad to do so."

"The case," began Thomas Donovan, "is this."

At great length and with proper circumstances, he told the story of deceit and trickery. "And," he concluded, "seeing that this woman got these coupons by false pretenses, we ask that you give them back to the one lady for whom, as we can prove, they were intended."

The editor pursed his lips, and tapped his table with a lead-pencil.

"You say," he said at length, "that this woman paid twenty-five dollars for those 33,000 coupons?"

"No, no," cried the three.

"She made that as a donation," exclaimed Miss McCabe, "irrespective of the number of coupons received."

"That may be very true," said the editor, "but the fact is she got 33,000 coupons from you people, and you people got twenty-five dollars from her."

"That's a very bad way of putting it," said the prefect, indignantly.

"Maybe so, but that's the way it would be put by their side, if I were to give you back those coupons. I really can't do it."

"Well, then," persisted Mr. Donovan, "will you agree not to count them at all?"

The editor put his head in his hands. "I —I really can't see that either," he answered. "These people, I suppose, know what they have put in, and if I were not to count them, it would bring them all down on me. After all, it would be their word against yours."

"Have you counted them yet?" asked the prefect.

"No; when packages come in, we simply put them aside, marked with the kind of coupon and the alleged number, and the name of the person for whom they are entered. As you know, we no longer insist upon each coupon being stamped. On Wednesday morning or early in the afternoon, we have a crowd to open the packages and verify the counts of those who send them in. They are published then in the last edition of that day's 'Journal.' Now, we haven't looked at that package, you claim that that woman brought in. In fact, I haven't received it. One of the other men must have received it, and marked it, while I was out—"

"Here it is," said Eva, stepping forward into the circle and holding in both hands the Christmas embroidered bundle.

All gazed upon it intently. Mr. Donovan hungrily, Miss McCabe with indignation, Miss Tennison in tears.

"Oh, that's it. I see it is entered for Miss Bigbie and marked 33,000. George! That's pretty rough. Put it back where you got it, young lady."

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" asked the prefect.

"I'm afraid we can't go behind the returns. You see, if we did it in one case, there's no knowing what trouble we'd get into. Everybody would begin to claim false returns. I really wish I could do something, but I see no way out."

"And still you see our claim is just," cried the prefect.

"It really seems to be. But there is the hard fact that you gave a woman 33,000 coupons and she gave you twenty-five dollars. Appearances are against you, and on appearances, they have just as strong a claim as you have."

"I see," said the prefect with flashing eyes, "that we have no chance of justice here. Let's go."

The three turned silently and faced Eva, who save for the few moments in which she handled the package, had maintained her sentinel-like position.

"Go on, Eva," continued the prefect, "at any rate we can hurry back to the office and work."

Eva led the way out, and the other three, as they passed, took one long last look at a beautiful package adorned with Christmas seals and bearing on its face the terrible legend:

"33,000 Coupons—Domestic,
for Miss Bigbie."

Outside the office, Eva fell behind, and they went their way silent and sorrowful. Miss Tennison wept, Miss McCabe groaned, and what Mr. Tom Donovan said under his breath was not distinct enough for record. They reached the school at a quarter to seven. The yard was thick with boys, and the air vibrant with their gleeful yells. Word had passed around that the Y. L. S. were about to snow the Sunflowers under. All were ready to take part in the demonstration.

The office was packed.

"What news? What luck?" These and a dozen other questions assailed them on their entrance.

"No luck at all," said the prefect.

"The editor said he was sorry, but he could do nothing," added Tom Donovan.

Then there arose cries and many voices.

Suddenly there came from the inside office a scream succeeded by a hysterical laugh. A silence came upon all without.

"Quick," came Michael's voice, "Brother Fat, get a glass of water." There was laughter again, a girl's laughter, then a shriek.

"It must be Eva," said the prefect, "she's got hysterics." And Miss Lilly McCabe, fol-

lowed by all who could crowd their way, pushed into the inner office.

Eva was sitting on a chair, an incipient laugh cut short by Brother Fat's putting a glass of water to her mouth. She drank a little and stopped, looking dazed and bewildered. Whereupon Brother Fat, with great presence of mind, dashed the rest of the water into her face. With another shriek Eva jumped from her chair.

"Oh, I want to go home. I must go home," she cried.

Some demon of terror seemed to possess the child. She was pale and trembling.

"What's the matter, Eva?" asked Miss McCabe.

"Oh, I must go home," wailed the girl, in tones that sounded heart-rending.

"Eva," whispered Brother Fat, his face expressing all the commiseration of an ideal undertaker, "is all broken up over those coupons stolen from Miss Tennison. She felt sure before we went to the 'Journal' that we'd get them back."

While Brother Fat was thus sympathetically explaining the situation, Miss McCabe had put one arm around Eva, and patting the child's cheek whispered those little words of endearment and consolation, which are ever ready to the lips of good women. The color slowly returned to the child's face, though there remained upon it an expression of uneasiness and mystery.

"Now girls," said the prefect, "go on with your work, I am going to see Eva home myself.

The poor child is almost heart-broken on account of Miss Tennison."

"Why, my dear little girl," said Miss Tennison, "you needn't take on so. The contest isn't over yet, and who knows but we may be able to make up."

Miss Tennison, as she spoke, took Eva to her arms, and hugged her affectionately.

Eva smiled gratefully, but, for the rest, remained passive, and with the same look of fear and uneasiness, was conducted by the two young ladies from the room. In silence the workers settled down to their allotted task. There was much to be done, if the coupons were to be ready by the agreed time, half-past eight.

"Poor Miss Tennison," said Mary Corbett. "I feel worse about her losing than I would feel if it were myself."

"Do you know," said Miss Raeburn, "that I was just about to say something like that. I wonder whether we could afford to trade off some of our coupons to get her some next week. We both have a good deal."

Miss Corbett was about to speak, when there came from the inner office a loud yell.

"Oh," screamed Brother Fat, "look, Michael!"

"Holy smoke!" yelled Michael.

There was an exodus at once from the outer to the inner office. All seemed to get through the door at once. Then everybody, even the most staid and self-controlled, broke into screams of wonder and joy.

Standing in the center of the room, his mouth wide open, his eyes magnified with wonder was Brother Fat, holding up to the wondering gaze of Michael a tissue-covered Christmas package, labelled in blue pencil,

"33,000 Coupons—Domestic,
for Miss Bigbie."

## CHAPTER XIV

*St. Xavier School Is Always on the Top. Jerry Sees the Very Latest Thing in the Way of a Ghost*

"WHO's been playing tricks on us?" demanded Michael.

"That's what I want to know," demanded Brother Fat.

"Say, Mr. Donovan," continued Michael, "didn't the 'Journal' people give you back those coupons?"

"They certainly did not," answered Tom, "and I want to say this beats anything I have ever heard of. When I left the 'Journal' office a few moments ago, that package was there."

"Well, then, somebody must have taken it after you went out," answered Michael. "Were you the last one to leave the office?"

"No; Miss McCabe came last, I think."

"So I did," exclaimed Miss McCabe, just then entering with Miss Tennison. "Why, what about it?"

"Then it was you," said Brother Fat, holding up the package, "that lifted this."

"What? What?—Why, I saw that very package the very last thing as I went out. Where did it come from?"

"That's what we all want to know," said Michael.

"Brother Fat was picking up out of the cor-

ner one of our empty boxes to fill with coupons, but the box was not empty. These 33,000 coupons were squeezed in."

"Maybe Eva lifted them," suggested Brother Fat.

"That's impossible," said the prefect. "She left the 'Journal' office first of all of us and was with us all the way home."

"And," added Michael, "even if she had taken them, how could she have brought them in here, without me and Brother Fat seeing them? It's a mystery."

"And it means," cried the prefect, with one of her most radiant smiles, "that Miss Tennison is going to win." Whereupon she caught hold of Miss Tennison and hugged and kissed her, in a manner, as Brother Fat subsequently remarked, which was shameful.

During this lively demonstration, Michael, having opened the package and ascertained that the coupons were there, uttered a yell of triumph, and hard upon his jubilant note came joyful screams from the women and lusty cheers from the men folk.

Noisy as were the boys outside, they, too, got an inkling that something important had happened. In a trice word went around that somebody had just brought in over 30,000 additional coupons for the Y. L. S. contest; and while bedlam broke loose in the yard thirty odd young women took turns in hugging and kissing Miss Tennison.

"I say," cried Brother Fat, "as the last young lady gave her a hug, "where do we come in?"

"You'll come in very well indeed," answered the prefect gayly, "if you and Michael will give us those coupons. We'll wrap them up in a different package, and Jerry will take them down to the 'Journal' office, with 5,000 more we have got in the office, and place them to the account of Miss Tennison. Just think of it. 38,000 coupons!"

"And how did you leave Eva?" asked Michael.

"I don't know what to make of that girl," exclaimed the prefect. "She had nothing to say, except to beg us to pray for her. Mrs. Milton wanted to send for the doctor, but Eva got more frightened at that than ever. She said she wanted to lie down and be alone."

"I dearly love Eva," said Miss Tennison; "she is so obliging and kind. In the last few days we have become very close friends."

"I think," said the prefect, "that she is upset on account of that trick. It's all her love for you. As soon as we have got these packages ready, we'll go over and let her know that in some mysterious way those coupons have come back.

Just then Father Donnell entered and the news was poured into his ears.

"This morning," he observed, "when I began to see what an awful mistake I had made, I went to the innocent children and asked them to pray that my blunder might be turned into victory. It looks as if God has answered their prayers."

"It certainly does," said Miss Tennison. "The Bigbie crowd have given away to you

twenty-five dollars, which would have bought them twenty-five thousand coupons. They can never make that up."

"I don't think we'll hear much more of her," said Michael. "And look here, all of you people, it's near half-past seven and there are lots of coupons to be got ready. The proces sion starts at eight."

In high feather the ladies returned to work, leaving the two boys to their mysterious performance within. At eight o'clock sharp, the procession was formed with four boys to each box, eighteen boxes in all, each one labelled "The Y. L. S. of St. Xavier Church, 10,000."

"One hundred and eighty thousand coupons!" screamed a youthful mathematician.

There were over seventy-five boys in the office. On this announcement they broke into such frenzied cheers and shrieks that Father Donnell, declaring that his head was beginning to ache, took a speedy departure for his room at the pastor's residence.

"Now, boys," called out Michael at the top of his voice, "Ready—march!"

Seventy-two boys, carrying heavy boxes, marched out, followed by at least twenty-four of their friends.

Brother Fat had constituted himself a committee of one to see to the general order of the procession. Up and down the line he flew, apparently all arms and legs, pushing and at the same time bestowing personal advice upon each and every marcher.

"Now fellers," he cried, halting them at the

school gate. "Give the ladies inside there one good send-off."

"Sarsaparilla, soda water, ginger ale,
and pop,
St. Xavier School is always on the
top."

"How much?" roared Brother Fat.

"One hundred and eighty thousand coupons!" roared the ecstatic crowd.

The procession moved north to Sixth Avenue, every inch of ground witness to sounds of unaffected jubilation. On Sixth Avenue they turned west, passing Main, and finally reaching Walnut. There were many halts on the way. Brother Fat knew the home of every St. Xavier worker on either side of the street and not one was passed without a halt and a ringing salute.

Long before the enthusiasts reached Main Street, Lieutenant Gildea took them in hand. In his easy way he checked the thoughtless outbursts that might give offense, and saw to it that the loafers, whose favorite meeting place in those years was between Walnut and Main on Sixth, kept a respectful distance.

No one coming within hearing distance of the procession could fail to catch its import. St. Xavier School, "always on the top" was advancing upon the "Starboard" with 180,000 coupons for the Y. L. S.

The boxes were conveyed quickly into the office of the contest editor. He did not deem it necessary to ask any questions, and, while Michael showed the boys where to deposit their

packages, wrote down on a slip of paper, "Young Ladies' Sodality, 180,000."

The boys halted outside the "Starboard" to give one farewell salute and then dispersed. Michael, in high good humor, hastened back to the office. All was well. The contest was going just as he wished it. The worst was over. There were no longer breakers ahead. So he thought as he entered. But the perplexed and gloomy face of Jerry filled his heart with foreboding. Jerry, all alone, standing at Michael's desk, was evidently bursting to speak.

"What is it, Jerry?"

"Michael—whisper!" said Jerry at the top of his voice. "I've seen a ghost."

"A ghost!" cried Miss Lilly McCabe, entering with a number of the workers.

"Yes, a ghost, and may the Lord be between us and all harm."

"For goodness' sake, man," urged Michael, "speak out: what ghost?"

"The ghost of Miss Tennison's coupons."

"I never heard of a coupon ghost before," said Michael, much disturbed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Jerry, that when I handed in those 38,000 coupons for Miss Tennison just now at the 'Journal,' that coupon man had on his desk right before him, that same tissue-covered package you've all been talking about. May I never sin, if he didn't, and it had those Christmas stamps on, and there was Miss Bigbie's name in blue pencil, and 33,000 coupons domestic."

"Oh, get out; you're stuffing us."

"Do you want me to swear to it? Somebody here is going to die soon."

"Can it be possible that there are two packages, one just like the other?" mused the prefect.

"One thing's certain," said Michael, "our package had the 33,000 coupons all right."

"Well," continued the prefect, "what about the package Jerry saw?"

"I wish Father Carney were back," muttered Jerry. "The devil's got a hand in this."

"Perhaps," said Michael, "the package Jerry saw is a fake."

"Fake nothing!" said Jerry indignantly.

"Or perhaps it is a duplicate package," suggested the prefect. "Perhaps there are also 33,000 in it, too. But how that could be, I don't understand."

"Sure," said Jerry, making for the door. "Things like that happen in Ireland every fine day. I'm going to confession."

## CHAPTER XV

*In Which Michael Discovers His Little Secret, and Dismays the "Starboard" Contest Editor*

"SAY, Ma," said Michael on his arrival home at ten o'clock that night. "There's an awful rumpus in the Sunflowers' headquarters."

"Yes, Michael?" said the sympathetic mother. She was sitting beside the bed of little Josephine who was sleeping peacefully. Mrs. Desmond had on her lap Master Charles' best suit. She had been plying the needle thus far into the night to make it presentable for the holidays. There were to be no new suits for the children at Christmastide.

"Yes"; continued Michael. "Our boys made an awful row going over to the 'Starboard.' They yelled and shouted about their having 180,000 coupons till everybody knew it. News of it got down to the Sunflowers' headquarters, and their manager, a man named Tom Jennings, got so scared that he came running up to the 'Starboard' and got there just as we were coming out. He was in an awful state of excitement."

"Who was?" exclaimed Charles, appearing upon the scene, rubbing his eyes, and, as was evident, very hastily and superficially dressed.

"Tom Jennings. He's a great ward politician. His collar was unbuttoned, his hat stove

in, and he was gasping for breath. He ran up to the office, and they tell me he raised a scene. He said that it was impossible for the Y. L. S. to have 180,000 coupons. The Sunflowers had brought in 130,000 and if the Eastern Stars and the other competing clubs had brought in as much as 25,000 altogether there would be more coupons than there had been papers sold. He said, among other things, that the 'Starboard' people were a lot of swindlers."

"Say!" exclaimed Charles, "you don't mean to say that the Sunflowers brought in 130,000 coupons, do you?"

"I guess they did, all right," Michael tranquilly made answer. "Mr. Jennings showed the contest editor figures. He said that the coupons claimed by our people and his amounted to 310,000. Then he reckoned that the other contestants had brought in at least 30,000 more. He also said that at the very least 80,000 coupons going in papers to outside places did not come back. In all, he said, the coupons would amount to 420,000 coupons—and that for six issues of the paper, would make the daily circulation of the 'Starboard' average 70,000 papers. Now everybody knows that the 'Starboard' ordinarily goes from 65,000 in the dull season to 76,000 in the lively times."

"Mr. Jennings has a pretty good head," observed Mrs. Desmond.

"So has the contest editor. He said that the contest had advanced the sale of the paper very much. He hadn't the least doubt that the 'Starboard' was averaging 70,000 circulation in the past few days. Then Mr. Jennings

said he wanted to be present at the count and wanted the person in charge of the Y. L. S. contest to be present, too."

"And who is the person in charge?" asked Mrs. Desmond.

"That's me; and I'll be there with bells on. Mr. Jennings expects to come face to face with one of the Fathers, or maybe the prefect. He'll be quite surprised when he sees me."

"And when is this count to take place?" asked Charles.

"Next Wednesday—the day after to-morrow—at one o'clock. The Sunflowers are now running around in circles. They're offering to buy coupons for their contest at twenty cents a hundred."

"You don't say," exclaimed Charles.

"And some of their workers have come to our people and tried to buy them off. Last week, one of their men went to Alice Morrow —who is averaging a hundred and fifty coupons a day and offered her five dollars cash, if she'd promise to turn all her coupons beginning with that day over to the Sunflowers at ten cents a hundred."

"They'll beat us," groaned Charles.

"They'll beat themselves," retorted Michael.

At this juncture, Josephine opened her eyes, blessed herself, and sat up.

"Halloa, Josephine; you're looking fine," cried Michael.

"I'm feeling fine," said Josephine, smiling easily, "and to-morrow I'm going to sit up. You see I'm going to win that doll."

"And the doctor," added Mrs. Desmond,

her face glowing, "has said that all danger is past. Thank God! Thank God! I was unhappy for a time last week because we were so short of money. I wanted, my dears, to give you all a nice Christmas. But you, my children, are more to me than all the money in the world, and as long as God spares you to me, I'll never, never again even think that I am poor."

"I say, Ma," said Michael, "we want God to spare you to us, too. You've been working on those old pants of Charles' all this evening. You've nearly blinded yourself. For goodness' sake, drop your needle, and rest your eyes."

"They are always rested when I see my children," said the mother, putting aside Charles' "Sunday best."

"And, I say, Josephine," pursued Michael, "do you want to hear a good story about the contest?"

"Oh, yes," cried Josephine eagerly.

Michael, thus adjured, told the wondrous tale of Mrs. Rockefeller and Miss Tennison, the return of the mysterious package, Eva's illness, and Jerry's ghost.

"It's a wonder Miss Tennison didn't take sick, too," observed Mrs. Desmond. "I hope the little girl won't be sick long. Josephine, what do you say to sharing your daily basket with her?"

"I should like it ever so much. Isn't Colonel Bridwell good though. I'm praying for him every day."

"You ought to, my dear," said the mother; "and if all the children whom he has been kind to remember to pray for him, he will get to

heaven sure; and be waiting there to greet them when they come. Those little children," she went on dreamily, "whom Christ so loves, those little orphans, who take His place, those poor little boys and girls, who, were it not for such kind men, would have nothing—nothing at all in this world but their rags and their Faith. May Our Lord remember him at the last."

"He has taken a lot off our grocery bill," said the matter-of-fact Charles. "Say, Ma, to-morrow, I'll bring one of those baskets to Eva, on my way to school, if you like; and some of those flowers the Sodality girls have sent."

"You couldn't do anything better," exclaimed Michael. "That girl is a wonder. You ought to see her work. She's as quick as a flash. I do hope she won't be sick long. She can work quicker than any one I've met. Anyhow I hope she will be well enough to have a merry Christmas."

Mrs. Desmond sighed.

"How I wish," she said, "I had something to send her. Well, at any rate, let us all pray for her that Our Lord Himself may bless her."

On Wednesday morning, December 21, Michael called up the Havlin, and, after a short delay, secured the ear of Colonel Robert Bridwell.

"I say, Mr. Bridwell, do you know Mr. Tom Jennings?"

"From every angle," came the answer. "Who is this talking?"

"I am Michael Desmond, Father Carney's office boy."

"Oh, it's you, is it? How's your mother?"

"Fine. She was so thankful to you for that ice-cream. My little sister who is sick enjoyed it, too, and she is so thankful to you for those baskets you sent her. She says she'll pray for you as long as she lives."

"And how's the contest going?"

"The way I want it. But this Mr. Jennings wants me to be present when they count the coupons this afternoon at one o'clock. I'm not exactly afraid of him, but I'm only a kid and I wanted to know if you wouldn't come over and stand by me."

"I'll be delighted to do so. You'll find me at one o'clock waiting for you on Sixth just outside of the 'Starboard' building. One word more, Michael, are you anxious to have a merry Christmas?"

"Every time," Michael answered.

"Well, then, drop this contest. You haven't the ghost of a show. You might as well try to carry water in a sieve."

"We're going to win," said Michael.

"Oh, shucks!" growled Colonel Bridwell, as he hung up the receiver.

Promptly on the stroke of one, the two met and, ascending the elevator, stepped into the office. The editor was there and beside him a middle-aged man, spare, florid, clean-shaven, very bald, and, just then, very nervous.

"How do you do, Tom," said Mr. Bridwell, giving a curt nod to the latter personage.

"How do," answered Tom Jennings. "You don't mean to say that you represent the

Young Ladies' Sodality of St. Xavier Church, do you?"

"I'd be very proud of it, if I did," answered the colonel. "If you had some of their class, you'd be a senator, instead of a candidate for city council. The representative of the Young Ladies' Sodality has been good enough to request me to be with him. Here he is as large as life, and equally beautiful. Mr. Michael Desmond, at your service."

"That kid," exclaimed Jennings disdainfully.

Michael, who had thus far been very nervous and ill at ease, grew indignant. His timidity fled. "I want to say right now," he began, "that there's no need to lose any time over the count of those coupons."

"There isn't—eh?" sneered Tom Jennings.

"As for your 140,000 coupons, we'll take them for granted."

"How kind."

"As for our own, there are none to count. Those boxes are stuffed with paper and old shoes. The St. Xavier Y. L. S. is out of the contest."

## CHAPTER XVI

*Colonel Bridwell, Mindful of Christmas, Acts as the Dove of Peace*

"WHAT!" cried the contest editor, jumping from his chair, and gazing open-mouthed at the calm youth in knickerbockers.

"How!" roared Tom Jennings, backing over to the desk and leaning heavily on it.

"O!" roared the colonel, breaking into a laugh, which reached the editorial room, three floors above.

"Why?" went on the contest editor, gesticulating wildly. "That knocks the bottom out of the whole contest."

"What do you mean by claiming 180,000 votes—confound it!" gasped Jennings.

"They did claim them, and you didn't like it. Now they do not, and you're madder than ever," said the colonel.

"Why, you ought to be glad that we do not," answered Michael. "The fact is I never made any claims at all. The kids did that. They saw 10,000 marked on each box. That was a little joke of ours to stir you people up, and they just came over here roaring 180,00 coupons till they lost their voices."

"Oh, I say," remonstrated the editor, "don't give up without due consideration; just think of that $1,000 piano."

"We have thought about it since last Mon-

day a week ago. We made up our minds, then. There is no question of our taking it up again."

"Oh, Lord!" cried the colonel. He had fallen into a chair and was shaking with suppressed laughter.

"The piano," continued Michael, addressing himself to Mr. Jennings, "so far as St. Xavier is concerned, is yours. You are welcome to it."

"Yes, Tom," said the colonel rising, "be good enough to receive this beautiful mahogany grand piano, value $1,000, with the compliments of St. Xavier Church. Oh, Lord!" and the colonel fell back into his chair, and choked and gurgled.

Suddenly a startled look came over the face of Mr. Jennings.

"The telephone, quick," he cried to the editor.

Catching up the receiver, he called up Main 23.

"Twenty-three!" exclaimed the colonel. "How appropriate!"

"Is this the Sunflowers? Say, this is Jennings speaking. Stop buying. Don't spend another cent. What?"

"You needn't worry," said Michael sweetly. "Since last Saturday when we came over with the fake coupons, we sold no more."

"Do you mean to say," cried Jennings, "that those young ladies of that Sodality have been selling us those coupons of theirs up to Saturday night?"

"No. sir, I do not. There wasn't a single girl in the whole Sodality who knew anything

about it. That was a little idea of Brother Fat's and mine."

"A nice way to train children," commented the angry Sunflower, "selling coupons on false pretenses."

"By George, Tom," put in the colonel, "I never knew till now how virtuous and high-minded you were. You ought to give up politics, and take up Sunday-school work."

"The school children," Michael went on to observe, "didn't sell you any coupons at all, except Brother Fat. And then we had to get some outsiders and we got them."

"We have been flim-flammed," exclaimed Jennings.

"You got what you wanted," returned Michael, with energy. "You laid yourself out to buy coupons. You asked people to sell them to you. You said you were perfectly willing to buy that old piano. Some of your men went after our best workers, and actually tried to bribe them to sell our coupons to you. We took you at your word, and did what you asked."

"I think, Tom," suggested the colonel, "that you ought to thank this obliging boy."

"Thank! Thank!" gasped Jennings.

"After all," commented the colonel, "you fellows have made the common mistake of the day. The popularity contest was intended to be a sport. You fellows started in to commercialize it. There will be no more popularity contests of that kind in this city for years to come."

"Well," assented Jennings ruefully, "I

reckon we did go too far. The fact is, I tried to keep the thing down, but it was no use. I want to say right here that I was dead against those fellows going after the St. Xavier workers. They did that over my head."

"Jennings," said the colonel, "you're a good fellow. If you could only see one or two things you'd be a good sport, too."

"Eh?" queried Jennings.

"First of all, you ought to see that the joke is on you."

Mr. Jennings relaxed not. The colonel took out a cigar, placed it ceremoniously between the lips of the unhappy Sunflower, struck a match —and—

"Puff!" he commanded. "Here, you take one, too," he added, handing a second cigar to the distressed editor.

Jennings took three puffs; the cigar was good.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. Then the suspicion of a smile passed over his face.

"Do you see it?" queried the colonel.

"The joke is on us," admitted Jennings, and his face relaxed into a smile.

"So it is," said the contest editor, puffing vigorously.

"One thing more," continued the colonel. "You've been looking at the thing from your viewpoint. Suppose you look at it now from Michael's. He saw that if he was to win the piano, he would have to buy it, and pay $2,000, double its value. He didn't have the money. Also he saw that you people did have the

money and were anxious to buy it. What would you have done in his place?"

"I'd have done as he did, I guess," admitted Jennings.

"That is, if you had sense enough. Now it's coming on toward Christmas, and there oughtn't to be hard feelings at this time. It's the time of peace and good will, and by the same token, your people are from Galway," continued the colonel, waxing enthusiastic. "Michael's folks are from the same place."—This was news to Michael. But that has nothing to do with this narrative.

"Young fellow," exclaimed Mr. Jennings beaming, "put it here."

"Bless you, my children," said the colonel, as the two shook hands. "And, I say, Jennings, dont' forget that the joke is on you.—What size hat do you wear, Michael?"

"Seven, sir."

"You'll remember that, Jennings. It's a seven, a stiff hat would look very well on him: and now we'll all go around and have an oyster soup. Come on, Mr. Editor, and forget your troubles."

## CHAPTER XVII

### *A Little Love and a Case of Scruples*

IT was nearing two o'clock, when Michael bade his friend, the colonel, farewell. The strain was over. The contest was done. It is true, there remained in the field and to be fought for, Miss Tennison, Miss Raeburn, and Miss Corbett, but the work for them would go automatically. And yet Michael, who should have felt relieved, was heavily depressed. What would Father Carney think of it all? What would the Young Ladies have to say? What would be the sentiments of the boys and girls of St. Xavier?

Brother Fat met him at the office.

"Say," he said, "here's forty dollars. I sold ten dollars' worth myself. They fell for it nicely and asked me to come back."

"I wouldn't advise you to try that," said Michael.

"Go back!" cried Brother Fat indignantly. "Well, I should say not. Think I'm a fool?"

Miss Corbett, the factory workers being on half time, was in the office cutting coupons. Beside her, sat a pleasant-faced man of forty, Mr. John Ring, an expert bookkeeper. He was helping, too. After the first week of the contest, he had suddenly undertaken to see Miss Corbett through. The young ladies, as

a Sodality, were taking a keen interest in the two.

"Michael," said Miss Corbett, on the office boy's entrance, "the 'Journal' has been ringing you up for the last thirty minutes. They want to get you as quick as possible." Michael entered the booth.

"I say, Miss Corbett," said John Ring, "I'm working hard to have you win that piano."

"You certainly are, Mr. Ring."

"And I think you'll win it."

"Thanks, partly to you, I think I will."

"Now, look here, I'd like to have a share in that piano."

"What's that?"

"I say, I want a share in that piano."

"But how—what do you mean?"

"Why, share and share alike." Miss Corbett stopped cutting coupons. She looked intently at Mr. Ring, and seeing something in his face, she blushed very sweetly.

"I was a fool four years ago," continued Mr. Ring. "I see now and have seen for some time how silly I was to quarrel."

"I thought, then," said Miss Corbett, "that my duty lay with my father. Somehow, I didn't make myself plain to you. Oh! How I've suffered."

"And you loved me all along? Did you, Mary?"

"Oh, John!" she said, and fell to blushing more prettily than ever.

The conversation stopped. Although I am bound to say neither resumed work at the coupons.

"Look here," cried Michael, bursting out of the booth. "Oh, I say, what's the matter with you two? Anything happened?"

"Nothing at all," protested Miss Corbett.

"We were talking about the piano," answered Mr. Ring.

"There's nothing to blush at in a piano," exclaimed Michael, gazing severely at Miss Corbett.

That young lady at once took up a "Journal" evening paper and set to cutting out the coupons therein in such wise that her rosy face was concealed from the too inquiring eyes of the office boy.

"Anyhow," Michael went on to say, "the contest editor of the 'Journal' called me up and said to tell Miss Tennison not to worry about those 30,000 votes."

"Oh, did he?" asked Mary Corbett, looking at John Ring.

"Indeed," said John Ring, looking at Mary Corbett.

"Oh! he did—and yes, indeed," echoed Michael. "He told me that he had decided not to count those 33,000 coupons for Miss Bigbie. I said, 'Why not?' and he said that there was some mistake. 'What mistake?' I asked. And he said they didn't bring in those coupons. There was nothing in the box. It was a fake. He asked me whether I didn't think it was funny. I said—Oh, hang it!" Master Michael paused.

The couple, perfectly oblivious of the scandalized youth, were smiling at each other, in that peculiar manner which, to the small boy,

who never can understand, seems absolutely fatuous.

Michael glared at them. The glare, it is scarcely necessary to say, was wasted. To John and Mary, just then, there were absolutely only two beings in the whole world. Michael ceased glaring and made an attempt to look patient. His patience was punished.

"Mary," said John softly.

"John," said Mary tenderly.

"Shucks!" said Michael and fled into Father Carney's office.

"What are you doing in here!" asked Miss Lilly McCabe, entering a moment later.

"Doing!" echoed the scandalized youth. "I guess I've got sense enough to come in out of the rain when it's raining. There isn't any room for any one else in that office of mine while Miss Corbett and Mr. Ring are there. Do you know that those two were spooning right under my nose?"

Michael's scandal grew deeper when, to his intense disgust, Miss Lilly betrayed an abnormal interest. She looked joyful; she beamed. She would hear nothing of the interview at the "Starboard" office until he had told her everything he knew about the actions and words of the couple without.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed the prefect. "Won't everybody be surprised! Why, we all thought that after the broken engagement of four years ago, there was no question of Mary Corbett ever marrying."

"Now in regard to that count with Mr. Jennings," resumed Michael, "I went over——"

"Hold on, Michael," cried Lilly, and walked over to the door. "Say, Mary," she continued, "come in one minute."

Mary entered. Miss Lilly, beaming, gazed intently into Mary's face.

"Is it so?" whispered Lilly.

"It is," whispered Miss Corbett.

"I could see it in your face," said Lilly and then, to the further scandal of the staring, wide-eyed office boy, the two young ladies fell into each other's arms.

After some laughter and tears on the part of both, Miss Corbett announced that she and John were going shopping, and a-shopping they did go.

"And now," began Michael once more, "in regard to that count at the 'Starboard.'"

"Wait a minute, Michael," said Lilly. "I must telephone one of the Sodality regulators who is a special friend of Miss Corbett's."

"Holy smoke!" ejaculated Michael.

While Miss Lilly McCabe was busy telephoning, Michael received a telegram. He read it.

"Meet me at Central Station six this evening.
WM. CARNEY, S.J."

"Whoop!" cried Michael. "I say, Miss McCabe, Father Carney comes back from Cleveland at six this evening."

"You don't say——"

While the office boy and the prefect fell into happy talk of Father Carney's return, the young lady whom Miss McCabe had just telephoned, came running breathless out of her proper home, and with a shawl thrown about

her head, hurried down the street. She lived, as did Miss Corbett, on the Sixth Avenue Hill. Presently she entered a house. She came out five minutes later—only to enter another and another. Other young ladies were soon making the same sort of calls; and Miss Corbett, when she reached her home, an hour or so later, was more than amazed to discover that every mother's daughter on the Hill knew of her engagement, and of such details as Master Michael Desmond had deigned to pour into the prefect's eager ear. Every maiden on the Hill was, for that afternoon, aglow with joy. They talk bitterly of the woman gossip; there's a beautiful side to it, too.

This last sentiment Master Michael—at this particular time of his life—would not have appreciated. He was profoundly disgusted with the prefect, who did little or no work that afternoon, and no less so with Miss Tennison, who seemed to be more excited about the love episode than Lilly McCabe.

"I'll tell Father Carney all about it," he meditated; "I guess he'll understand. You never know when you've got these women folks, at least I don't; he does."

At six o'clock, Father Carney, looking every inch his old self, appeared amid the stream of passengers, coming out of the main exit of the Central Depot.

"Hey, hey! Halloa, Father Carney!" cried the joyous Michael.

"Why, Michael, how are you?"

"Fine. But I've been lonesome."

"You looked pinched. You've been working too hard. How's the contest?"

"Let me have the valise. The contest? I'm afraid you won't like what I did."

"You think so?"

"Don't scold me, Father. Maybe I spoiled things, but I did the best I knew how."

"No matter what you did, I won't scold you."

"I didn't know what to do for a while," continued Michael, as they left the station and walked up to Fourth Street.

Father Carney took another look at Michael. The boy had lost flesh. His eyes were sunken.

"There's one thing I am sure of, my boy," said the priest kindly, "and that is that you've worked very hard and done more—far more than anybody had a right to expect of you. Whether you blundered or not, I'll never forget that."

"Thank you, Father. Well, we've dropped out of the contest, to-day."

"Oh, you did," said Father Carney tranquilly. "And I suppose you dropped out because you saw you'd have to buy the piano, if you really wanted to win it."

"It was worse than that, Father."

"Indeed! Perhaps you saw that you might not win even if you spent the retail price of the piano."

"That was it, Father."

"You did perfectly right. I'd have done so myself."

"You see, Father, it got clear to me that we had no chance, unless we wanted to spend

money. Then I got the idea that by trading off our own coupons, we could help Miss Raeburn, Miss Corbett, and Miss Tennison and make it sure for them."

"Why, Michael, that was a splendid idea."

"The prefect didn't see it that way when I first told her about it. But she came around after a little talk, and was just as enthusiastic as I was. I told Brother Fat, too. He was all against it, at first. Those were the only ones who knew it, except Eva Fagan. By the way, she's pretty sick and is almost dying and crying to see you."

"Eva sick?"

"She's nervous and troubled."

"I'm glad you told me, Michael. I'll see her, to-night, if possible. Again I congratulate you on your good sense in the contest."

Michael brightened visibly. He went on to tell of the votes week by week, and of the various details connected with his withdrawal, to which Father Carney lent a most attentive ear.

"My boy, you've been doing marvellously," he cried; "you'll be mayor of the city some day."

Michael also spoke of Father Donnell's blunder and set forth in detail how that blunder in some mysterious way had been turned into victory.

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Father Carney. "There's a fine story in that. As for Father Donnell, I don't wonder he got caught. In the contest of three years ago, some one tricked

me that same way, and I came near losing the piano."

By this time they reached the parish residence, and Father Carney permitted the eager Michael to carry his valise up to his room.

"Look at that stack of mail," said the Father, pointing to his desk. "I see a letter from the colonel on top."

The Father opened the letter. "Listen to this, Michael:

"DEAR FATHER CARNEY: Great minds run in the same channel. That office boy of yours and myself concluded about the same time to sell out to the enemy and betray your Young Ladies' Sodality. In the past ten days, I've had some of my old ward workers on the job. We sold the Sunflowers twenty-five dollars worth of coupons. To this I am adding seventy-five dollars—making a check for one hundred dollars—which I am enclosing you to use as you wish. Wishing you a Merry Christmas, I am, Yours sincerely,

ROBERT BRIDWELL.

"What does this mean, Michael?"

"Why, I forgot to tell you, Father, Brother Fat and I got the idea of selling our extra coupons to the Sunflowers."

"Oh!"

"Yes, we began to sell them all right, and stopped Saturday night. Here, Father, is the money."

And Michael handed to the astonished priest ninety dollars.

"Michael, Michael!" exclaimed Father Car-

ney, and he sat down and laughed very much as had the colonel on that same afternoon.

Suddenly he stopped; Michael was crying. The boy had stood the strain like a stoic. He had measured his wits against the wits of men. He had carried responsibility far too heavy for his young shoulders, and now that it was all over he was blubbering.

"I guess you think I'm a girl," he said, not without difficulty mastering himself.

"Guess again, Michael. You're as much of a man as a boy of fourteen can be. Now clear out, my boy, go home, and get to bed. You need a sleep. I'll take care of the office myself, and I'll see Eva Fagan without delay."

Michael, all smiles, took his leave.

"Good gracious!" soliloquized Father Carney. "What a boy!"

* * * * *

"Oh, Father, is it yourself?" cried Mrs. Milton, opening the door of her home one hour later to Father Carney. "You're as welcome as Christmas. Eva wants only one thing in the world, and that is to see you."

"How is she, Mrs. Milton?"

"I wish I could tell you, Father. Since last Monday night she's been in the queerest state you ever saw. She cries and she prays, and sometimes she goes almost into hysterics. She won't eat and she don't sleep. She takes no interest in anything, excepting you. She's always asking when you'll be home. If it

weren't that she prays so much, I'd be thinking that she's possessed."

"Michael," said Father Carney as he took off his overcoat and hung it on the rack, "without intending to do so, gave me a pretty good idea of what's the matter. Of course, he doesn't know himself, but by the time he got through talking, I saw that the sooner I had a talk with Eva the better. You say she doesn't eat?"

"Not enough to keep life in a canary-bird, Father."

"Well, while I'm having a little talk with Eva, you get her ready a good supper. I dare say she'll be cured in fifteen minutes."

As Father Carney spoke they were going up the stairs.

"This way, Father," continued Mrs. Milton, throwing open the door of the back room.

"Eva," she continued, "here's Father Carney just come home and the first thing he does is to come and see you. Now, what do you think of that?"

Eva, who was seated in a rocker, jumped to her feet, gave a gasp of joy and fell back again. For a moment her face lighted up, only to resume, as she slipped into her seat, its expression of worry.

"Don't try to get up, Eva," said Father Carney. "In a few minutes you'll be strong enough to fly. Why," he continued, as he shook her hand and shook it warmly, "you look more like Ash Wednesday than Christmas."

"Oh, Father," said Eva, struggling to speak, "I—I want to tell you something."

"That's right, Eva," said Mrs. Milton, "tell him everything. Here, Father, sit down. Now, I'll leave you two to talk it out."

Father Carney, as Mrs. Milton went out, took a look about the room. It was small but very tasty. A tiny iron bed with a snowy coverlet, a washstand, wardrobe, the rocker, and one straight chair made up the furniture. In a recess, there was a beautiful altar, before it a light, over it a statue of the Sacred Heart. At the foot of the bed was a picture of the Immaculate Mother, so placed that Eva's eyes, closing or opening, might rest upon it first.

As Father Carney took in these details, a sense of the presence of exquisite purity, of tender love and strong faith was borne in upon him. Every room tells the story of its occupant. Eva's told hers, and told it well.

"So, Eva, you've got a scruple?"

"It's worse than that, Father Carney."

"No; I think not. By the way, Eva, that was quite a clever trick you played."

Eva sat up straight.

"I mean," continued the priest, "when you put a dummy package in the coupon office of the 'Journal,' and walked out with Miss Tennison's coupons."

"Why, Father, who told you? I thought nobody knew that."

"Michael unconsciously gave me the clue. He says you did not do it. He says that from the time you got to my office till you took sick, he had his eyes on you."

"So he had," answered Eva, with a little wan smile. "He was looking at me while I slipped

the package from under my coat to a place where he was sure to find it that very night. But he didn't see I was doing it; my hands were under my cloak."

"I see," said the Father. "Of course when you started in to get those coupons, you intended producing them just as soon as you got back to the office."

"Why, yes, Father, I did."

"And then when you once got them and started walking back from the 'Journal' office, you began to worry, to think that you were falling back into your former sins."

"That's just the way I felt. All the afternoon, from the time I paid a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, I had my mind on getting those coupons of Miss Tennison's, if the 'Journal' office people wouldn't hand them back, and it seems so clear to me they belonged to Miss Tennison."

"You were right, my dear, they never belonged to any one else. To begin with, Father Donnell had no intention of disposing of them. He simply put Miss Tennison's coupons in the hands of a third party, to deliver them to her. He did not, in fact, could not give that strange woman any sort of ownership."

"That's the way I felt, Father, till I took them. On the way back to the office, something seemed to say, 'You're a thief again; you'll be a thief all your life.' "

"There is no question of theft, Eva. To steal something, you must take it from the owner. The owner of these coupons from the start and throughout was Miss Tennison. If

you had not managed to get those coupons, Miss Tennison would have suffered a cruel injustice."

"But, Father, here's what troubled me most; I took a sort of joy and pride in fixing up that dummy package and going to the 'Journal' office with it. And I really enjoyed slipping the dummy package out, and getting the real package under my coat, while the contest editor was facing me and looking at me. Don't you think, Father, that I must have a natural taste for stealing?"

"God bless me," ejaculated Father Carney. He was forming in his imagination a picture of a little girl in a long cloak, manipulating two packages, exchanging them and walking off with one under the direct eye of the very person in whose custody it was placed.

"Since my general confession, I've never touched a pin that wasn't my own. For the first few weeks I was often tempted. I felt like taking things just to see whether I could take them without being seen."

"High art," muttered Father Carney under his breath.

"What's that, Father?"

"Nothing: go on, my dear."

"I always fought against this feeling. After a while, I had no desire to take anything in order to keep it. But I was still tempted to see whether I could take things without being noticed, and then put them back."

"Art for art's sake," muttered Father Carney.

"Well, after a while that temptation left me almost entirely. But it came back that night, and after I took those coupons, I felt that I loved to steal, and that I might grow up into a thief. Then I felt like despairing. I tried to pray and couldn't. It began to look to me as if I had committed a mortal sin. When we reached your office, I was in a perspiration. Then I began to feel weak. I was afraid to let any one know I had taken the package. They would say that I was a thief. So I managed, right under the eyes of James Connell and Michael, to put that package where they'd be sure to find it, and then I don't know what happened. I must have fainted."

"I understand," said Father Carney, after a pause, "you've had a bad case of scruples. To begin with, when you took those coupons, you were convinced that you were doing right. Nothing can change that. Your conscience was formed. You did what you thought was right. The doubts which came afterward could never make sinful what was not sinful at the time it was done. In the next place, your enjoying the transfer of the two boxes under the very eyes of the contest editor was not an enjoyment of theft, but of a natural skill you have in manipulation. Use those hands of yours to do good and beautiful things for God. You may thank him for their deftness, and may always keep in your memory as a motive of sorrow how in one period in your life you employed them against God's holy law."

"But, Father, ever since I took those cou-

pons I haven't been able to pray. It looked as though God were angry with me."

"You've been praying more than ever," said the priest.

"I've tried to, but I was so troubled and distracted."

"Exactly: you've prayed, but because you were suffering from a scruple your peace was gone. The prayers weren't pleasant, but they were good, and God was listening. In a word, Eva, you did not steal, and what is more, I venture to predict that you never will steal so long as you live."

The color had insensibly come back to Eva's cheeks. She was already her former self. She now broke into a smile of sheer peace.

"Thank God, Father, I am well again."

"Very good. Now, I'm going to give you a blessing. Some day, Eva, you are going to be a contemplative; and remember to pray for me."

"I say, Mrs. Milton," called the Father, after blessing the happy child, "come up, please."

"Why," exclaimed the poor woman, raising both hands in astonishment at sight of Eva. "What's happened, Eva, you look so different? How do you feel, my pet?"

"Hungry!" cried the child.

Eva wondered why the two broke into a laugh. She was cured.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### *In Which Christmas Comes, and Everybody is Happy*

IT was Thursday morning, December 22, and going on toward ten o'clock. Seated at his desk, Master Michael Desmond was enjoying the first bit of real leisure that had fallen to his lot in thirty days. He was now as undisturbed as we found him in the first chapter of this veracious chronicle. In years he was older by several weeks, but in experience! Much work, much mental anxiety, much responsibility had crowded themselves into these stirring days. Michael was at leisure and he was glad. He glanced out of the window: it was snowing heavily. King Winter was coming into his own, and bringing with him the dear old Christmas, with its tradition of snow and ice and frost, and a Child whose advent gave that severe season ineffable charm.

"Gee!" soliloquized Michael, "if Josephine only had a Christmas tree, I'd ask for nothing more."

For Michael was very happy. Father Carney was back and was pleased. He had come down to the office at nine, and looking over the mail and surveying the Christmas tree, had gone down town, saying he would be back in an hour or so. Michael was waiting for his return.

In the meantime, mysterious packages, very Christmassy in appearance, were coming in by messenger and by mail; little girls and little boys were tip-toeing in modestly, leaving Christmas letters for Father Carney. Miss Margaret and Miss Frances Dalton were in the library just across from the office, putting the last touches to the Christmas tree.

Michael gazed at the swirling flakes and conjured up the vision of a Christmas tree at his own home, with everything on it that Josephine could wish, with everything on it that could fill the heart of Charles with joy, with just the things his mother so needed. He saw in his mind's eye this varied assortment of gifts on and around the tree, with its flashing tinsel and lighted candles. About the tree stood a band of comely boys with radiant faces, and they were singing in notes of unheard loveliness:

"God rest you, merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay;
For Christ, Our Lord, the Saviour,
Was born on Christmas Day
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray!
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy!"

* * * * *

"Hey, Michael!" Father Carney was shaking Michael.

"Oh, tidings of comfort and joy!" cried

Michael. Then he raised his hand and rubbed his eye.

"You're right, Michael, it *is* tidings of comfort and of joy. You've been sleeping at the switch and I don't blame you. Come into my office. I want to see you for just a moment."

"I don't know what's happened," said Michael, following Father Carney. "I was sitting there thinking about Christmas, and the next thing I knew you were shaking me."

"Well, Michael," said Father Carney, putting both his hands on the boy's shoulders, and gazing with unusual benevolence into the tired eyes, "how in the world did you get through it all?"

"Oh," answered Michael, "it was fun at first, and things went by themselves."

"Sit down, Michael," said Father Carney, playfully giving the office boy such a shove toward a chair behind him that he could not choose but obey, "and tell me all about it."

"After a while, Father, things began to go wrong. The other fellows were out with the money, and everybody was telling me we had no chance. Then I began to worry."

"I can see traces of worry in your face yet, Michael."

"I didn't want to believe we couldn't win at first; but at last I saw clearly we had no chance. I was awful blue and I went to church and prayed."

"You couldn't have done anything better."

"At first nothing seemed to come of my prayer, and I must have fallen asleep—though

I am not sure whether I did or not. Sometimes I think I was in a sort of daze."

"Yes, my boy, go on."

"Well, just as I was leaving, an idea struck me all of a heap and I felt that my prayer was answered."

"And what was that idea?" asked Father Carney, looking strangely interested.

"Why, it was this: that you would be willing to let our own contest go, provided we could see Miss Raeburn, Miss Corbett, and Miss Tennison through."

"And, look you, Michael, didn't you have the idea then of selling your coupons to the Sunflowers?"

Michael paused.

"Not right then," he finally answered. "That idea began to come just as I was leaving the church, though I didn't pay much attention to it, till Brother Fat and I got to talking it over."

"Strange!" exclaimed the Director of the school. "During my retreat—in fact, at the very time you were praying—I was distracted by the thought that I should get you to give up our own contest and work for those young ladies."

"You don't say!" cried Michael. "And did you think about our selling coupons to the other people?"

"I am afraid, Michael, that that idea was not in answer to your prayer. Very often, God does give us good thoughts in prayer and then we go on to add to them. Your resolution to

drop our contest and work for the young ladies was, I believe, in answer to prayer.

"But what about selling coupons?"

Father Carney smiled.

"That, Michael, is exactly what I would have done when I was a boy."

"Then it was all right," said Michael.

"In fact," continued Father Carney, "if I had been in charge of this contest, as you were, with all its buying and selling and trickery, I believe that, old as I am and sensible as I ought to be, I'd have done just as you did."

"Then, of course, it was all right," persisted the boy.

"One minute, Michael; did it occur to you when you were selling those coupons to the Sunflowers that they would never have paid a cent for them if they knew you were out of the contest?"

"But we weren't out. We were getting ready to get out."

"You were not out formally, my boy; but to all intents and purposes, you were out the night you made your prayer in St. Xavier."

"Well, they were crazy to buy, just the same."

"Yes, because they thought you were pushing the fight against them."

"I can't see where there is any dishonesty in the matter. They wanted us to give up, and they must have known that we might have given up at any time. They were willing to keep on paying for them as long as they didn't know for certain that we hadn't withdrawn."

"Now, my dear boy, we're coming close to

the point. You say that you intended to be honest. So you did; and I'd hesitate very much before saying that your little trick was dishonest. But there is another word almost like *honest* which ought to enter into our consideration."

"Honest? Honest? What word, Father?"

"*Honor,* Michael."

"Oh," exclaimed the boy, looking puzzled.

"Honor, Michael—a sense of honor in these days of dollars and cents is fast going out. Honor is a nice sense of what is right and just. A man may be honest, and still have little sense of honor; and the worst of it is, he may lose by degrees his honesty, because he has neglected honor. In my lifetime, I have known many a good young man to enter the political field. All of them that I am thinking of were bent upon being strictly honest. But once in office, the question always with them was, 'Is it stealth to keep this money? Is it stealth to profit by this chance?' They never asked themselves, 'Is it honorable?' As a result these men have helped to swell the great army of politicians who are rightly called grafters. Losing sight of honor, they by degrees even cease to be honest."

"It's pretty hard to draw the line, Father, between honesty and honor, isn't it?"

"Yes, my boy, you are right. They call it a *sense* of honor, and so it must be developed. Let me tell you a little story which will throw some light on it. You have read 'Treasure Island,' haven't you?"

"Twice, Father."

"The author, as you know, was Robert Louis Stevenson, a man who was practically an invalid all his life. When he was thirty-four years of age, he was as poor as a church mouse. It was coming on toward the first part of the year and the poor fellow was wondering how he could pay his debts. A few weeks before Christmas, the editor of the 'Pall Mall Gazette' offered him forty pounds—two hundred dollars—if he would write a Christmas story of eight thousand words, and Stevenson jumped at the offer. That sum of money would change the whole situation for him. So he started with tremendous enthusiasm to write his story. But sickness came and he couldn't do it. He tried and tried; but to no purpose. At last he had to give up. Instead of sending the story he intended to write, he gave them one of his old manuscripts and they accepted it."

"Wasn't that all right?" asked Michael.

"Yes, it was. The 'Pall Mall' editor was, according to his contract, going to pay Stevenson forty pounds, and Stevenson needed the money badly, but he refused it against the advice of his friends. He said he had intended to give his best work at forty pounds, for eight thousand words. He had not been able to give his best work. He would take only ten pounds."

"That was fine!" exclaimed Michael.

"Now, don't you think, Michael, that a Catholic school should try to act as finely as a writer of honor?"

"Of course it ought."

"And what would the Young Ladies' Sodality think? The girls in it are nearly all poor—nearly all working girls; but most of them have a nice sense of honor. I have met no class of people in the world superior to them in that very important respect."

"We got that money by a trick," said Michael slowly, "and the young ladies don't want trick money."

" 'Cato, thou reasonest well,' " quoted the priest.

"And you don't want it. Say, Father, can't we restore it?"

Father Carney laughed. "Here it is, Michael," producing a sealed envelope—"for I knew you would be asking for it. There are a lot of children in your office waiting to see me. You run out and fix this up. It may interest you to know that Father Donnell returned to Mrs. Rockefeller her money. It was very tainted, indeed. Run along, Michael, and hurry back. I want you as soon as possible."

Father Carney was just dismissing the last of his visitors when Michael returned.

"Well, my boy?"

"It's all right. I ran down to their office and found Mr. Jennings there, and a fine looking man, rather tall, with a black mustache and red cheeks, and——"

"Oh, that was Tom Coleman, the great criminal lawyer. He's the president of the Sunflowers."

"Yes, that was him. Mr. Jennings introduced him. I said—'Mr. Jennings, we sold you people ninety dollars' worth of coupons

when we knew we were out of the contest. It was a trick, and we don't play tricks for money. Here it is, and a Merry Christmas!' "

"And then, my boy?"

"Mr. Coleman laughed and said—'We're beaten again, by Jove, and beaten by a boy.' Then he shook my hand and asked me if there were any more like me at home, and gave me this." Here Michael held up a five dollar gold piece. "And told me it was a Christmas gift from the Sunflowers. Then he sent you his best regards, and then I left."

"Very good, Michael, you've done a fine month's work, for which I am more than thankful; and if you don't forget the way you finished up, to-day, it will help you all your life to be what I expect you to be—a man of honor. The Young Ladies' Sodality is very grateful to you. We had an informal meeting of the officers last night, and every one insisted that some substantial recognition should be taken of your services. The Misses Raeburn, Corbett, and Tennison also threw in their mite. As for myself, I feel that you should get a Christmas present from me, too. Your vacation will begin now and go on till January 2. You need a rest, and beginning with January 1, you will receive an increase of one dollar a week in salary."

"My," said Michael, "won't my mother be glad!"

"You may tell her I didn't intend to raise your wages until September, but you made me do it. Here, now, take this. Open it and examine it."

The envelope was addressed to

"Master Michael Desmond,
With every wish for a Merry Christmas,
From The Young Ladies' Sodality."

Michael opened it and took out a bunch of five-dollar bills, crisp, clean, fresh from the mint.

"Count 'em," ordered the Father.

"Oh, I say!" cried Michael. "This is a mistake. "There's twenty-four of them here. That's a hundred and twenty dollars."

"I am sorry you're not satisfied," said Father Carney gravely. "You see, Michael, we're doing the best we can. You know our Sodality is not so very rich."

"But, Father, it's too much."

"Oh, that's your trouble, is it? Well, it isn't—not a cent too much. Go on now and start your vacation."

"Gee!" said Michael.

"Aitch," said the Father, "Shake, my boy, now go."

Michael ran all the way home. The heavy snowfall—so heavy that one could not see across the street—allowed him to do this, without attracting much attention.

"Say, Ma," he yelled, bursting into the sitting room, and shaking the snow from his hat upon the floor, "I'm on my vacation till January 2, and look at this!" He threw the twenty-four bills in her lap.

"Why, Michael, where did you get this?" she cried.

"It's yours, Ma; Father Carney gave it to

me with the compliments of the Young Ladies' Sodality."

Mrs. Desmond rose and tried to speak, but could not. Then she drew Michael to her, kissed him, turned to Josephine and kissing her went into the kitchen.

Michael looked at Josephine, whose face was filled with awe. He took a step forward and saw his mother in the kitchen, on her knees, her eyes shining with tears, raised to the simple picture of the Sacred Heart, her lips moving in the widow's prayer of gratitude.

* * * * *

It was the afternoon of Christmas Day. The snow was on the ground, the air cold and bitter. In an ecstasy of joy, Josephine Desmond, oblivious of the company around her, and holding in her arms the doll with the wonderful wink, a doll of the bluest eyes and the flaxenest hair, a doll whose dress was a vision of blue and white, was gazing upon a Christmas tree, blazing with tiny candles, glittering with pretty bundles, rich and unlooked for ornamentation, begirt with everything the sweet, innocent child's heart could desire. In a word, it was just such a tree as Michael had dreamed of before being given his vacation. There were things there for Charles, too; just the things Michael had dreamed of.

"I knew we were going to have a Christmas tree," said the child. "You see, I didn't have much to do while I was sick; so I prayed the

little Child Jesus to bring us a Christmas tree, and He did."

"And I," said Michael, "prayed that we might win the piano for the three ladies, and they've as good as won."

"And just think of Father Donnell," said Charlie. "He gave thirty thousand coupons to a swindler woman, and he got all the little ones to pray that his blunder might be turned into victory and they prayed—and it was."

"And what did you pray for, Mrs. Desmond?" asked Father Carney.

Mrs. Desmond, looking ten years younger, made answer: "I asked Our Dear Lord for little Josephine's life, and He gave me that, and all that I might have asked, and more than I would have dared to ask. To-day is more beautiful to me than the day of my marriage."

"More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," said Father Donnell.

"I understand, now, what prayer means," said Michael.

The conversation became general; the room was crowded. Miss Dalton was there with Eva and the radiant prefect, Miss McCabe. The treble voices of children on the street outside, raised in song, brought a hush upon the company:

"God rest you, merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay;
For Christ, Our Lord, the Saviour,
Was born on Christmas Day,
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray,
Oh, tidings of comfort and joy!"

"Just think," said Michael, as the sweet, thrilling chorus without finished the stanza: "I was day-dreaming about a Christmas tree the other day, in the school office, and I heard boys' voices sing that very carol, and the voices were the sweetest I could imagine."

Michael paused, then proceeded to add: "All the same I love these voices better——"

"Because," said Father Carney, "you love the owners of those voices, Brother Fat, Paul Carpenter, and the little heroes of the piano contest."

The dozen boys were brought up by Mrs. Desmond. There was plenty in the house, and, fortified by oranges and candy, the youthful choir favored the company with a selection of Christmas carols.

"Cæsar!" exclaimed Brother Fat, making away with an orange, "this is the finest Christmas I ever had. I got lots of presents. I'm happy."

"And the Sunflowers are sure of their piano," said Charles, "and they're happy."

"And Miss Tennison is sure of her piano, as Miss Bigbie has withdrawn, and Miss Tennison's happy," said Father Donnell.

"And Miss Raeburn is just as sure of her piano, and she's happy," added the prefect.

"And Miss Corbett has not only a cinch on her piano," said Michael, "but she gets a man attachment along with it, and she's more than happy."

"Michael, what do you mean?" asked his mother.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? She and her young man are going to get married."

"Who, what young man?" cried Mrs. Desmond.

"Why, John Ring."

"And Michael, you never told me a word about it!"

"I never thought you'd care one way or the other."

"On the question of a coming marriage, men and women have no common ground."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Father Carney, "if nothing had come out of the contest but bringing together again that splendid couple estranged, a few years ago, through a wretched misunderstanding—all the time and trouble spent upon it would be worth while. I thought a moment ago I was happy. Now I know I am."

"And I," said Father Donnell, first arising, folding his hands, clearing his throat and gazing into space, "am most happy because those stolen coupons were recovered, because Eva, who recovered them, has received for Christmas a beautiful cloak from Miss Tennison, which makes her look like little Red Riding Hood, and because I can hand the school over to Father Carney once more. In fact," went on the old priest, "were it not that the Young Ladies' Sodality failed to get their piano—the only fly in the amber—I think we all, from little Josephine, the youngest, to myself, the oldest, would have every reason to rejoice."

"There is no fly in the amber," said Father Carney. "Just before coming here, my friend,

Colonel Bridwell, waited on me with Mr. Tom Coleman and their mutual friend, as Dickens would have it, Mr. Tom Loker. Mr. Coleman made a beautiful speech. He said the Sunflowers were delighted with the way the young ladies had acted, and, in admiration of their high sense of honor, he, therefore, in the name of six or seven gentlemen, begged me to accept for St. Xavier School, a piano. It's there now. It's in the hall. It's the very piano I wanted. The one, Michael, I spoke to you about at the very beginning of the contest."

"Hurrah!" said Michael, "and that's *the* popularity piano."

"Say, Michael," whispered Brother Fat, "I'm eating too much. I'm going to have an awful pain. It's coming on now."

"Well, then, stop eating," counselled Michael.

"That's easy said, but I can't and I won't. My mother said I never could stand prosperity. She's right!" and he took another orange.

She certainly was. Brother Fat went to bed very early that night and his mother sat by him.

All this was in an aside.

Father Donnell held up his hands:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said—then he paused, hemmed, looked into the air for five seconds, and bringing his hands together said: "In view of what Father Carney has just told us, I withdraw that fly from the amber. This is a flawless Christmas. Therefore, let us all rejoice."

As if his words were a preconcerted cue, the

boys, stimulated by the coming martyr, Master James, alias Brother Fat, raised their voices in the pretty carol:

"Good Christian men, rejoice, rejoice,
With heart and soul and voice."

And so we leave them—God bless them every one—as we pray we leave the reader, rejoicing.

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